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ADVENTURE

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Adventure

A FOREIGN LEGION NOVEL

SUICIDE PATROL

by

GEORGES SURDEZ

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Vol. LXXXIX
No. 2

CONTENTS
for August 1934

William Corcoran
EDITOR

A Complete Adventure Novel

Suicide Patrol . . . . . **GEORGES SURDEZ** 2

Deep in Morocco a Foreign Legion patrol sets out on a mission of unparalleled audacity—and a friendship and a feud bide time till the bloody outcome. A novel of the Legion's great tradition, and of the soul of a soldier, by a favorite Adventure author.

And These Thrilling Adventure Stories

The Lonesomest Man . . . . . **DONALD BARR CHIDSEY** 36

He was a killer, this man Aubrey—and death was his sole companion in the swamp. A tale of the deep Everglades.

Tunnel Law . . . . . **BORDEN CHASE** 42

Murder under the river—the vengeful fury of the sandhogs—and the cold merciless judgment of tunnel law.

Kline of the Cardogan . . . . . **DONALD MACKENZIE** 50

Kline was a man among men, and Kline was tough—and Kline was aboard the *Cardogan,* seeking to satisfy a ten years' hatred and avenge a wrong.

Ice *A Sea Poem* . . . . . **BILL ADAMS** 64

Lost Heads . . . . . **CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE** 65

Far up the dread Mawa valley two parties of prospectors join forces, surrounded by headhunters. Escape for all is impossible—and grim is the story of their desperate, deliberate retreat.

Strong Back, Weak Mind . . . . . **WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES** 76

Traditional is that saying on the railroads; and Mike Cardigan bore it out nobly. But skill in steam comes not from books nor bosses, but from years of—"strong back, weak mind!" on a locomotive platform.

That Whistling Son of a Gun . . . **J. B. LEFFINGWELL & R. STOWELL** 87

A humorous tale of Tropic rebellion.

Of High Command . . . . . **F. R. BUCKLEY** 91

A novelette of the redoubtable Caradosso, wherein are explained in robust detail certain hilarious and gruesome military matters—to the satisfaction of, if not all, at least the lusty Caradosso—and the reader. A story of the medieval *Condottieri.*

The Camp-Fire *Where readers, writers, and adventurers meet* 118

Ask Adventure *Free information from all over the world* 123

Adventure Told You *Fascinating facts from the office files* 126

The Trail Ahead *News of next month's stories* 128

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SUICIDE PATROL

THE FRENCH Expedition operating from Kasbah-Tadla, in the Moroccan Middle-Atlas, had reached the pass through the hills known as Fom-el-Metmor. In preparation for the attack to open the trails to the south, the infantry companies dislocated into small combat groups, and deployed to face the rocky slopes flanking the passage.

The units of the Foreign Legion could be distinguished from all others at a glance. There was no need to look at the uniforms. Legionnaires in formation move with that unmistakable, confident, cocky precision peculiar to the Corps, the results more of a mental attitude than military training. For Legionnaires are professionals of war, and they face action with the alert, graceful poise of a great actress facing her public.

The battalion was moving toward the firing line without a wasted step, without a man out of place, supple as a blade of steel, powerful as a battering-ram. As the sections took open order, to offer a poorer target to the whining lead poured down by snipers lurking among bushes and boulders on the slopes, there were short, shrill whistled signals, few words, few gestures. It was a Legion show.

Suddenly, this orderliness was marred by an extraordinary interruption.

At the extreme left of the Fourth Company, there was confusion. Two men had started to fight, and to fight with fists. They forgot regulations, discipline, danger. The sergeant in charge of their group, a large, bulky German, ran to one of them in time to catch him as the fellow dropped back from a terrific jolt to the chin.

A gripping novel of the Legion—and the honor of men of war.

By GEORGES SURDEZ

"Carroll!" the sergeant barked.

The man who brought up the rear of the combat group, a tall, rangy Legionnaire who wore the single green chevron of first-class private and the ribbons of two decorations on the breast of his faded khaki tunic, stepped forward. He was twenty-six, his shaven face was so deeply tanned that the light brown hair showed golden against his flesh below the rim of the kepi.

"Take care of the other."

"Right, Sergeant."

And as Sergeant Kulhman shook the dazed man to consciousness, shoved him back into place, Legionnaire Carroll stood before the other. Dacorda, thirty years old, short, with very broad shoulders, was powerful, sure of himself. He had a swarthy, round Roman face, and sleek black hair. His lips twitched furiously, as he tried to dodge Carroll and get at his opponent.

"Take it easy," Carroll said in English. He knew why Kulhman had selected him. Dacorda, thought to be an American, although enlisted as Italian, must learn quickly and firmly what was best for him. An officer was coming to see what the trouble might be, and it was important to close the incident before he arrived.

"Let me at him," Dacorda pleaded.

"You'll get all the fighting you can handle in a few minutes."

"He can't call me that and get away with it."

Carroll shoved him back with his left hand. Then Dacorda swung for his jaw. With the officer on the way, haste was needed. Carroll calmly reversed the Lebel rifle he held and the iron-shod

butt swung upward, caught the angry man in the belly. Dacorda sat down.

"That's that!" Carroll helped him to his feet, pushed him into the rank. "Keep your mouth shut, now. Everything can be settled later."

When Sub-Lieutenant d'Argoval, slim and aristocratic, reached the spot, Kulhman's group was on the move again.

"Well, Kulhman?"

"A man slipped, Lieutenant. New chap, not used to climbing. Nothing important, Lieutenant."

D'Argoval stared at the sergeant, at the men. He was young, twenty-one or two, but he had experience. He saw that something had happened and that he would not be told. A novice might have asked questions. The sub-lieutenant shrugged and walked away.

"You're lucky the sergeant's a good guy," Carroll said scathingly to Dacorda. "That was fourteen days in the jug for you, eight of them solitary, if he reported you. What the hell was the matter?"

"That lousy wop, Gianella, has been riding me all morning because I can't talk good Italian," Dacorda grumbled. "I said I'd sock him if he kept it up. He did, and I did."

"Well, you enlisted as an Italian, didn't you?"

"That's nobody's business."

"Gianella was just kidding."

"Me too, I was just kidding! And I'll kid some more, see? And what about you socking me in the gut? What do they take a guy for? A slave?"

The tall Legionnaire ahead of Dacorda turned a lean, wrinkled face framed by gray hair to peer over a bony shoulder. A clipped, dingy red mustache showed under his hooked nose. He was forty or more.

"Carroll's all right. He had to do it. Didn't I tell you that temper would get you into a jam?"

"Sure, you told me, grandpop." Dacorda laughed. His anger vanished and he was smiling.

The First and Third Companies of the Battalion were in line, the groups huddled about the automatic rifles, forming a long, grim, crouching row. The Second and Fourth Companies were placed in support, sheltered by a low ridge of dark stone. The gunners tinkered with their weapons, and the others, having nothing to do, waited, sprawling or squatting on the ground. The officers gathered, ten yards behind the troopers, to consult the map a last time.

"We're attacking in half an hour," Sergeant Kulhman told Carroll. "It'll take that long for the artillery preparation. Say, maybe you had better talk to those new fellows—the lieutenant who brought up the replacements told me the short one must be a bit crazy. He fights all the time."

Carroll nodded. The two recruits, Dacorda and Zerlich, had joined the expedition the preceding afternoon, with a reinforcement draft from Tadla. It was easy to recognize them as newcomers. The other men, who had been campaigning for almost seven weeks, wore faded, lacerated khaki and boots mended with strings and wire. Both Dacorda and Zerlich had been issued new clothing and footgear before being sent to the front. Carroll found the two talking together, away from their companions.

"Have a smoke?" he offered. "They're American cigarettes."

"We got our own butts," Dacorda snapped.

"Thanks," Zerlich replied. He accepted a cigarette, lit it. "So you're American? What's your name?"

"James Carroll. They call me Jacques around here."

"Been in this outfit long?"

"Six months. Before that, with the First Regiment, in the Sahara. When did you enlist?"

"We've been in nine months. In training, Bel-Abbes and Saida."

"Like it?"

"It's all right," Zerlich commented.

"It's lousy," Dacorda grumbled. "Nothing doing most of the time. And stew every day. Don't the saps know you can roast meat?"

"They feed you better on active service. Plenty of game."

The three went still as the mountain batteries crashed into action. Yellow billows of smoke curled on the slopes. The black infantry was launching the first drive to break through the Pass, and the sharp, bloodcurdling war shouts of the Senegalese could be heard above the noise of the explosions.

Zerlich paled a little, smiled in apology.

"Guess I am pretty old for this game," he said. "But I had a tough break. I went to the States from Austria when I was a kid, ten or eleven. I was clerking in a hardware store, in Toledo, for years and had some money saved. I wanted to see the old country. Turned out there was some question about my old man's citizenship papers; they went through after I was twenty-one or something, and I was caught without a re-entry permit. I was trying to get in on the quota, got stranded in France, joined the Legion in Dijon, ran into Dacorda in Lyons, on the train. He was coming from Paris, where he had signed up. You see—"

"Shut up," Dacorda put in.

"Why? Carroll's here, ain't he? I was saying, Dacorda was born in Jersey. He had a share in a speak in Newark. Was making out all right, only he got himself a wife too many. The first one got wise, and he had to beat it."

"Hell, they said I'd get five years in the pen," Dacorda explained. "What's your out, Big Boy?"

"Nothing fancy," Carroll assured him. "Thought it was a broken heart at first. But the longer I stay here, I think it was indigestion. Can hardly think what the girl looked like. I suppose I really wanted to move around—"

"Soldier of fortune stuff, like in a book?" Dacorda wondered. "You're the first I ever seen." His dark eyes kindled, he indicated the battlefield. "What's this racket we're working at? Going to be tough? A real fight?"

"Wouldn't be surprised," Carroll informed him. "See, this bunch was supposed to throw a scare into the tribes around here. Make them behave, and say it's peace. But they called in a gang from down south to help them. They can fight, all of them, don't kid yourself. They have plenty of Spanish Mauser Rifles, smuggled to them across the French Zone, from the Riff."

"Any chance of beating it?"

"You mean desert?" Carroll shook his head. "Not in the mountains. These guys chop a guy up unless he talks their lingo. You might try it from Meknes, when we get back, if you have money. Hard to make, though. The Spanish turn you over to the French if they spot you on their territory. And it's eight years in the penal camp if you're gone more than a week. Ever see—"

He was interrupted by the shrill summons of metal whistles.

"Better get going."

THEY ran to their places. The company moved, marched some distance left, swung and advanced toward the enemy. Carroll noted that his new acquaintances were nervous, but nervous in different fashions.

Dacorda strode, gripping his rifle so tightly that his knuckles were white. His face was grinning, tense with excitement. Zerlich was shaking, loose-kneed, shuffling, ready to drop or run. However, Carroll did not worry. He knew by past experience that it was easier to keep with the rest than to run alone.

"Is the small one troublesome?" Kulhman asked Carroll, in German.

"No. He'll be a good man when he learns what this is all about."

"That's good."

Kulhman spread his arms wide, as the whistles blew, and the group sank down. The automatic rifle went into action instantly, jerking on its metal fork. Carroll had handled an automatic in the past, and watched the firing with professional interest. Corporal Gottlieb, an expert, grouped his bullets masterfully. He was not hitting anyone, but he cleared the zone before his group of snipers.

Somewhere to the right, an officer was chanting the range.

"Two-fifty, two-fifty, up fifty . . . three hundred, three hundred. . ."

Four feet from Carroll, Zerlich stretched out full length, pushing his musette-bag forward as if to shield his face. He did not enjoy the occasional prolonged twang of a passing missile. But Dacorda was grinning, fingering the bolt of his Lebel rifle.

"Hay, Jack—see the guys way up there? Two of them? Can I take a crack at them?"

"Wait for the order."

"They're not hitting nobody on our side."

"Never mind, they will," Carroll predicted, grimly.

Kulhman was on his feet. "Come on, come on!"

The ground was open before the company. Tiny geysers of dirt marked the impacts of bullets dropping short. Some distance to the right, Captain Barbaroux strolled, stick under one arm, pipe between his teeth.

"That guy's good," Dacorda said, with grim admiration.

Legionnaire Chuckleit, a gigantic, sandy-haired rifle-grenadier, sat down bruskly. He tried to rise, managed to gain one knee. Then, very slowly, as if a mighty hand pressed the nape of his neck, his massive shoulders arched, his right fist was propped on the earth, his head swinging lower and lower. He slithered sideways, stretched out. His face was oddly calm, as if with intense satisfaction.

Carroll felt stark cold along his spine.

"Wouldn't touch booze because of his health," Legionnaire Fenmayer shouted. "Look at him now! Posthumous citation for him!" Fenmayer was barely nineteen, a strong German boy, reckless and spirited, probably the toughest lad in the whole section.

Carroll steadied. The feverish calm of action came to him. He saw, heard, sensed everything, yet he felt as if in a dream. And he knew this sensation of unreality would last until he dropped, or began to suffer from fatigue and thirst.

"Rifle fire at will," Kulhman relayed the order. "Don't burn cartridges for nothing. They cost money.'

"Go ahead and shoot now," Carroll told Dacorda.

The tough recruit promptly emptied his magazine. Then he turned a rueful face to Carroll. He had believed that his every shot would hit, that enemies would tumble like nine-pins. And he discovered that a stretch of three hundred meters gave eight bullets much space to miss in.

"You aim too high," Carroll advised.

Dacorda nodded, fired again.

A runner came from the captain. He howled, "Sergeant—the old man says your group's too far left. Work it right, right. Got it?"

"Sure. Tell him to come and show me himself, eh?' But Kulhman addressed his men, "Keep to the right."

It seemed simple enough for the combat group to keep in touch with the bulk of the company. But a rise of soil divided the slope they were climbing, the enemy's line appeared to make a right angle, and try as they would the Legionnaires were drawn to the left if they wished to face the firing. No man likes to offer his flank to the enemy. Carroll knew that this was a planned maneuver of the hillmen. Kulhman knew it, too.

"Right, I said, right!" the sergeant yelled. "Fix bayonets!"

The long blades glistened. Swinging right would bring some of the hillmen near enough for a sudden rush with the steel. Unnoticed, the Chleuhs had left a wedge of resistance at that point of their front.

Running with the velocity of frightened deer, half-naked riflemen, gaunt legs flitting, were darting down among the boulders. At a shouted signal, a number of them dove into a thicket of bushes, to fire on the other sections of the Fourth Company, while the rest concentrated on Kulhman's group. The whole stunt consumed less than fifteen seconds, and the combat group was neatly isolated. A runner saw this, started off, circling down the slope to report.

A well-aimed shot brought him down. Carroll saw him crawl into a hole near a large rock. It was impossible to know whether he had been seriously hurt.

Kulhman tried to lead the way across the slope, to regain contact as ordered. But the knot of Legionnaires had already lost touch with the engagement as a whole, and was fighting an isolated skirmish, one against five.

Carroll scowled, then laughed. Captain Barbaroux would be furious. The trick was perhaps the simplest used in the hills. The natives figured that even if beaten in the main encounter they could score several minor victories such as this, and make the French pay for their success. Not infrequently a half-score isolated men became ten corpses.

The experienced Legionnaires knew they were in a nasty plight. Zerlich's attitude had not changed. He was trying to bring his belly lower than his ankles. Dacorda was blissfully unaware of the danger. He enjoyed the fighting, sweated, panted. Even the tensely worried Kulhman caught Carroll's eye and nodded. Dacorda would be all right in action. Fenmayer was tossing grenades, which fell short but scared the hillmen back.

"Looks very bad," Kulhman suggested mildly.

His face, ordinarily brick-red, was almost white. Whether he escaped alive or not, he would suffer. Captain Barbaroux would blame him for having allowed his group to be isolated. And after the event, excuses would be hard to make.

"Come on, come on!" he begged.

But the Legionnaires were forced to take cover, literally pinned to the ground by a hot, accurate fire. Another man was killed, another wounded. Which left only eight in action.

Having brought their opponents to a halt, the natives started a concentric maneuver, slowly and surely backing the survivors to the edge of a sheer drop of thirty feet into a ravine thickly overgrown with bushes. Their intention was clear: if both tips of the human crescent managed to attain the brink of the pit, the Legion group would be crushed as if in a vise.

But they still respected the handful before them. They kept at long range now. From time to time, Carroll saw a head and shoulder appear, the pale flicker of a flaming rifle in the sunlight.

"We've got to break through before they rush us," Kulhman said.

Dacorda moved a few feet from his comrades, and hoisted himself on a boulder. He was as agile as a goat, deliberate and confident. Crouching, his rifle propped, he picked off man after man as if he had done nothing else all his life. Carroll knew that he was witnessing a rare spectacle: the first engagement of a born fighting man. Dacorda did not like drill, did not like routine. But he would go far in the Legion, if he lived.

"Get that fool off there," Kulhman howled. "You, Dacorda, come here! We've got to get going—can't leave you there—"

Dacorda, who did not understand

French well, half-rose to listen. Suddenly, he slipped, tumbled from the boulder. His body struck the edge of the pit, slid off and vanished.

Kulhman stepped to the edge, gripped the branches of a bush for support and peered down. He gestured in discouragement, shook his head:

"He doesn't move. Done for, I guess." Then his attention snapped back to his job. "Gottlieb, you'll have to fire as you walk. But we'll be in the clear in a couple of hundred yards."

"Suits me," the corporal agreed.

He passed the broad leather sling of the automatic over his shoulder, braced the stock of the weapon against his right hip, barrel supported by the left hand. Thus, it was possible for a powerful man to walk some distance, firing the gun as he went, with only brief pauses to insert new magazines.

Legionnaire Panailoff, a tall, blond Russian, veteran of several wars, retrieved Chuckleit's bag of rifle-grenades. He ascertained the location of the nearest natives, laid the rifle almost horizontally on the ground to obtain maximum range, and fired four grenades in quick succession.

The metal missiles whirred through the air with a ruffling sound, there followed dull, smashing explosions. Carroll and the others were ready, and when the hillmen broke cover to avoid the splinters, the automatic and the Lebel rifles started to shoot. Kulhman was firing a very long-barreled German pistol, shooting wrist supported by the left hand.

Several Chleuhs fell.

"Come along, now!" the sergeant ordered.

CARROLL had not forgotten Dacorda. But Kulhman reported him dead. He had not even cried out as he fell. Moreover, although it was the tradition to pick up casualties when possible, the chief concern of all now must be for the automatic rifle and its ammunition. The capture of such a weapon meant many deaths on the Legion's side. Carroll started off with the rest.

But Zerlich, who had gone to look down at his comrade, raced up to him, clasped his arm. Carroll shook himself loose; and the old fellow caught at his garrison belt from behind.

"I must get to him, I must get to him!"

"We can't do him any good. The slobs won't bother going after him down there. Maybe they didn't even see him drop." Carroll felt that the wild-eyed Zerlich thought him a coward, a renegade, to leave an American lying exposed to mutilation, and he concluded lamely, "The ambulance men will pick him up before long."

"No, no! I must get to him!"

"Well, ask the sergeant."

Zerlich released Carroll, rushed to Kulhman. He spoke in very fluent German: "Please, kindly please, let me find my comrade. Please!"

"No time. Must save the machine rifle first. Orders."

"You just let me go. Legionnaire Carroll will help me. He's an American, too. I came so far with Dacorda that you cannot understand, Sergeant. For nine months, I have been with him every day, watching him. I can't leave him now."

Kulhman lost his temper.

"Shut up and get going, you blockhead! Want to get your throat cut? He doesn't move. The fall killed him."

"Please, I must get to him!"

"You're crazy. Get out of my way!" And as Zerlich did not obey, Kulhman's heavy hand rose, struck him squarely in the face, knocked him down.

He could not be blamed. His group now consisted of but seven men and two wounded. There was the automatic to save, which represented other lives. Zerlich was arguing with a superior in action, and Kulhman had the right to blow out his brains.

"You don't understand," Zerlich picked himself up, desperate. "It's millions, I'm telling you, millions! I must get to him now, help me, please! If I delay, all will be lost!"

"Maybe you could let us try," Carroll put in, trotting up.

He was touched by the old man's devotion to the surly Dacorda. The poor fool had gone mad, shouting of millions when he had enlisted in the Legion for a bonus of twenty dollars and the royal pay of five cents a week!

"Go ahead! Only we can't wait for you. If your throat's slit, you can't blame me!"

Carroll nodded. "Come on, Zerlich, we'll get to him."

There was an unexpected volunteer, Legionnaire Gianella, who had fought with Dacorda some time before. He was considered a humorous fellow, something of a clown, but a brave man in action. During the World War, he had been a sergeant in the famous Alpini.

"I quarrel with him," he said in his lilting French. "But he's almost Italian, and a good, strong fellow. Even if he struck me so hard, I do not wish him harm. I must help."

Kulhman was some distance away already, followed only by the gun crew and the wounded. Carroll knew that he was reluctant to leave one of his men in the lurch, for there were few as kind and courageous as the German. But responsibility for the automatic weighed on his mind.

Zerlich appeared to have lost all his fear. He strode, heedless of the bullets vibrating about him, gesturing, excited. At last, he crouched at the exact spot from which Dacorda had dropped. He pointed.

"There's the body."

Dacorda was face down, motionless, and blood covered a flat stone on which his head rested.

"How will we get down?" Carroll said aloud.

"Easily," Gianella spoke.

He produced a rope, thin and strong, which was used for fetching waters from deep wells. He tied it to the handle of his entrenching tool, wedging the small spade between the boulder and the ground, blade sunk in the earth.

"Wait until I call, then come down one after the other."

Without further conversation, he slid over the edge, grinned briefly, his teeth glittering white in his dark face, and dropped from sight. He yelled that the line was clear, and Zerlich followed him. Carroll was last, after a rapid glance about him. He noted with satisfaction that the hillmen were concentrating on the retreating group. The automatic was the prize they sought, and they felt sure that they could rake in the strays later.

"Let's go!"

"A moment," Gianella suggested. "Maybe we better take the stairs with us."

He jerked on the rope skilfully, until rope and entrenching tool tumbled down.

They knew approximately where Dacorda had dropped. But they had to hack their way through thick bushes to find the spot.

Carroll turned the body over, saw a wound on the forehead. Zerlich unbuttoned the tunic, removed a thick wallet with shaking fingers from an inside pocket. Carroll did not wonder at this. He would have done the same to obtain means of identification, the address of the man's relatives and friends. A man did not rob a comrade before two witnesses whom he had not known more than a day.

Gianella unscrewed the plug of his canteen, and was gingerly dabbing at Dacorda's forehead with a handkerchief. "Not hurt much. If he's a good man, he'll wake up when he smells this wine."

Carroll felt the torso, the legs, looking for wounds other than the shallow, if

ugly-looking gash. Zerlich, who had been so eager to help Dacorda, was doing nothing except rustle papers, somewhere behind the group. The Italian shoved the spout of the canteen between the unconscious man's teeth. The wine spilled over the chin at first, then after a gurgling grunt and a cough, Dacorda opened his eyes.

"What the hell?" he challenged, sitting up suddenly. Then he recognized Gianella and spoke in Italian. While he was perhaps not too fluent, he knew many curses.

"Shut up," Carroll snapped, "he came with us to help you."

"Yeah?" Dacorda rubbed his eyes with his knuckles. Then his hand went to the pocket where he kept the wallet. Instantly, he was excited, tearing at his undershirt. Carroll saw a scapular strung around his muscular throat with a slender chain of gold beads.

"Who's got my dough, eh? Somebody snitched it!"

"Here," Zerlich said, handing back the wallet. "I got this to write to your folks in case—"

"You keep your dirty fingers off my stuff!"

"Listen," Carroll advised, "keep your shirt on, fellow. Without this guy, we wouldn't be here."

Dacorda opened the wallet, glanced into it. He slipped it back in the pocket. He still looked like a badly mangled man, with the blood smearing his face, spotting his clothes. But he was evidently unhurt. He rose awkwardly, staggered, then looked up.

"Baby! What a drop! Say, Jack, I must be lucky."

"You said it! And you'll have to be lucky to get out of here, too. So far as I know, we're right in the thick of them. They counter-attacked around here."

"Hell," Dacorda said carelessly, "they ain't so tough!"

But the remark reminded him of his present and most pleasing occupation. He picked up his rifle, examined the magazine. His gestures were soft, caressing.

Carroll, first-class Legionnaire, was automatically in charge.

"We'll work our way to the right. This ravine probably opens up on the plain, where the French are."

THE mountain artillery was pounding hard. The detonations of rifles, the hammering of automatics, and at intervals, the distant crashing of grenades, could be heard. But the ravine itself seemed deserted. The four stopped to take a long drink, then started off.

But the moment they left the spot where they found Dacorta, directly beneath a slight overhang of the brink, two or three shots slapped out at short range, lead slashed through the twigs and foliage. The Legionnaires leaped back to hug the cliff.

"They can't lean over far enough to shoot us here," Carroll remarked. "We're safe enough."

"But *we* can't shoot at them from this place," Dacorda protested.

"That's too bad," Carroll agreed sarcastically, and he looked at the recruit. "Say, you're a queer guy. You were talking about deserting, a while back, and now you seem to like it."

"Sure, I do." Dacorda was candid. "I was glad when my regiment was kept in America during the war. And they had to draft me in the first place. What a sucker I was. Don't seem to make sense, but it gives me a kick."

"You must be one man in a thousand," Carroll suggested.

"Maybe," Dacorda agreed without false modesty.

For several hundred yards, the four walked without interference. The natives had given up trying to shoot them from above. And they conversed in four languages. Carroll used English with Dacorda and Zerlich, French with Gia-

nella. Dacorda and the former Alpini spoke in Italian. Zerlich employed German with Gianella, who had picked that language in the Legion. Yet not one of the four felt any wonder. It seemed the most natural thing for them to be grouped in the ravine, fleeing from foes with whom they had no quarrel, and serving a foreign power.

"Look out," Dacorda spoke suddenly.

Some distance away, the cliff became a steep slope, which would be easy to scale. Carroll nodded. The natives were fighting on their own soil, must know this place, and had probably reached it first. The four Legionnaires were silent, walked cautiously.

When the expected shots came, they dropped to the ground.

After returning the first volley, Carroll counted the reports, singling them out by position and sound. For it is easy to distinguish the sharp report of a Mauser, for example, from the thudding detonation with a slapping echo of an old-fashioned Chassepot rifle.

"Seven, maybe eight," he declared. "Let's go ahead."

For several minutes, the affair became a desultory duel. The Legionnaires moved from cover to cover in rapid rushes, while the natives waited in hiding.

Then the reports were very close, within a few yards. But the thick undergrowth made accurate aim almost impossible. One merely caught a glance of a fleeting cloth, the rustling of leaves.

"They're damned close," Dacorda breathed.

"Yes. Better fix your bayonet, fellow."

The stocky Legionnaire obeyed. Zerlich was pale as cream cheese, and appeared about to be ill. Gianella was sweating, and the drops beaded his thick, black mustache.

Carroll, the spearhead of the group, was attacked at close quarters first.

A Chleuh, nude save for the loin-cloth girdling his slim waist, materialized from a bush less than three feet away, leaping out from the side, knife brandished. Carroll hopped away, and the blade aimed at his chest caught his tunic over the left shoulder, rent the sleeve to the elbow, where it slashed into the flesh.

The Legionnaire dropped toward the hillman, shoulder forward, knocked him down and fell with him. The other was as tall as Carroll, but many pounds lighter. He squirmed and struggled, his free hand clawed at the soldier's throat, scraping his cheek. He contrived to clear his blade, sought to strike again. But Carroll's left hand circled his slender, sinewy wrist, and clung grimly.

They whirled over and over, the native was on top, trying to bring his knees on the Legionnaire's chest. Carroll brought the point of his bayonet against the lean, brown side. For an instant, the hillman seemed about to break free and save himself, then the long steel shaft sank in.

Carroll shook himself free, scrambled upright, and clubbed at the head with the Lebel's butt, like a man clubbing a snake. A couple of blows were enough.

Carroll panted. Again, he felt as if dreaming, an odd, fierce drunkenness, the intoxication of extreme danger and of panic, urged him on. His comrades were struggling with the other natives.

There was a Chleuh kneeling on Zerlich. The skinny chap had been borne down easily, a ripping thrust had torn the front of his tunic. His hands were hampered by the tangle of loose cloth and severed straps.

Carroll lunged with the bayonet, caught the attacker in the flank. He heaved upward, literally pitched the hillman aside. Then the blade broke off.

Gianella was keeping off three men, whirling his rifle about his head in a *moulinet* as perfect as in a fencing room. They dodged and leaped away from the swinging butt with comical agility. Carroll's gun crashed in the small of the back of the nearest mountaineer. The

steel stump dug in, and the man dropped and writhed, like a worm cut in two by a spade.

Carroll lost his grip on the weapon, closed on the next man with bare hands. A frenzy possessed him. Just what he did, he never recalled. But the Chleuh's wiry but light body was soon inert in his grasp.

Shots crashed out very near. Dacorda leaped back from his assailants, and fired, half-crouched. Carroll looked for his rifle, found it, straightened and sought for new foes. But the brief combat was over, three survivors were crashing madly through the bushes. They left six corpses behind.

"Ugly brutes, ain't they?" said Dacorda.

A number of Legionnaires were trotting down into the ravine. There were Kulhman. Fenmayer and Gottlieb with the automatic rifle, and Sub-Lieutenant d'Argoval. The latter grasped Carroll's shoulder impulsively and shook him.

"Thought we might be too late. Glad to see you, my friend!" He turned to Dacorda and spoke in French, "Your sergeant is very satisfied with your conduct." He added in English, "Good soldier!"

"You tell 'em," Dacorda admitted.

II

THE pass through the hills at Fom-el-Metmor had been cleared of its defenders. The French column marched on and reached the plain beyond, the cavalry brushing away the scattered stragglers of the mountaineers.

But before the general in command could follow up his success and attain the next range of hills to the south, a terrific rain storm, accompanied by thunder, turned the plain into a lake of mud, the trails to bogs in which trucks and cannon were mired to the hubs. The roads between Kasbah-Tadla and Fom-el-Metmor were impassable for wagons. With the arrival of supplies problematic, it was foolhardy to keep on across a strange and hostile region.

The expedition encamped around the small native town of Ras-Metmor, a picturesque huddle of low, flat-roofed houses surrounded by a crenelated defensive wall which was buttressed by high towers at regular intervals, and resembled somewhat the medieval strongholds of the robber barons. There was no attempt to quarter the troops in the abandoned buildings. Health conditions were most unsatisfactory. So a small city of tents and light shacks rose on a hillock to the southwest, and the troops settled down with grim patience to wait until the sun dried the soil.

Carroll worked at the construction of trenches and dugouts, with the Legionnaires. And life was tolerable, for if the roads were not good enough for military convoys, a swarm of traders such as always follows any armed expedition in primitive lands, found them passable. These people were avid for profit, and found in their greed for money the courage to risk themselves. They hailed from the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean mostly, Greeks, Maltese and Syrians. And they charged gold-rush prices for their goods. A bottle of poor wine, such as sold for three francs on the Coast, was handed out for fifteen francs.

Carroll received some money from home. Both Zerlich and Dacorda were well-supplied with cash. Men who are liable to be slain at any time are seldom thrifty. And they visited the town at night. When off-duty in the afternoons, they strolled in the zone protected by the outpost, and fished the streams with home-made lines.

"What do you intend to do when you get through here?" Zerlich asked Carroll.

"Newspaper work if I can get it," the younger man replied. "And you, Dacorda?"

"Think I could get to be sergeant if I stuck in the Legion?"

"Sure. You've got to learn French well enough to talk and to write it a little. What they want for a nom-com is a guy who has guts and isn't too dumb. You're all right, except for the French. You can be sergeant inside three years. That means eight hundred francs a month in Morocco, too."

Dacorda smiled. "Then I guess I'll stick around a while. I think I have a pull with that young guy, d'Argoval. He said he'd put me on the corporals' list as soon as I could talk French more. What do we do tonight?"

"The Moulin Rouge is open."

"Okay by me."

An odd incident marred that afternoon. The three had left camp for a walk and a swim in the narrow stream crossing the valley. Carroll produced a small pocket-camera, which immediately infuriated Dacorda. Even Zerlich did not appear overjoyed.

"Who'll see them?" Carroll protested. "Maybe I'd send them to my folks in Pennsylvania, that's all."

"You never can tell who sees what," Dacorda insisted.

"What are you worried about? Who cares out here how many janes you married? If it was a murder, you might be taken out, or if you were a big time crook. But bigamy? Marriage laws are different in France, anyway."

"Do me a favor?" Dacorda was stubborn. "Don't even mention me. I'm under another name, but somebody might get wise."

"What about you, Zerlich?"

"Don't want my picture taken, either."

Carroll shrugged and pocketed the camera. His years in the Legion had given him a broad tolerance for the sins of men. What Dacorda had done, what Zerlich feared, was their own business. But he was beginning to suspect deeper motives than those they were willing to allow.

They went to the Moulin Rouge that night. It was a night of strange portent.

In other surroundings, the Moulin Rouge would have seemed shabby, miserable. Thirty-six hours after the town was occupied, a Syrian trader opened it, with stuff brought on a couple of mule-drawn vans. He brought a few girls, some of them lazy, dull Algerians, some Spanish wenches from the Riff ports. They sang and danced. They were frontier town girls.

The officers did not frequent the town. The sergeants had their own resort, somewhat more pretentious and expensive. The Moulin Rouge catered to privates. Prices had been regulated at a meeting of the officers so as to be fair to the traders and to the troopers. The rules and regulations applied in garrison cities were not upheld. Men who fought were separated and not punished, unless serious harm was done.

The armed patrol which policed the town visited the establishment once every hour. There was a permanent guard on duty, a man picked for strength, who acted as official bouncer. The Moulin Rouge occupied a deserted residence of ample size, and tables overflowed from rooms into stables and cotes. The Syrian presided behind his plank bar, shutting off the angle of the largest room.

When Carroll and his comrades entered, the place was crowded. There were pink-cheeked young Frenchmen serving their regular term of military service in the artillery; solid, muscular infantrymen of the native regiments, who resembled Hindus in their khaki uniforms and turbans. There were Legionnaires; there were grinning, jovial Senegalese negroes; and even a few Indo-Chinese, mostly officers' servants. The various types did not mix much

and occupied different corners of the rooms.

The bouncer had used his privileged position to become very drunk, and was asleep in a corner. It was obvious that the three had arrived immediately after some excitement. A girl was sweeping broken glass from the dirt floor. And a Russian Legionnaire was playing an accordion.

Young Fenmayer was seated with Gianella and a husky, silent German at the table next to theirs. He explained that the Legionnaires had wished the accordion to be played, that the owner had insisted on supplying music with his old phonograph, and that the machine had been smashed. The Syrian had added a tax to the price of drinks, to pay for his wrecked property. It was judged fair, and no one was to report him for increasing his rates.

"It's my treat tonight," Dacorda announced. "Cognac!"

The cognac was vile, Carroll thought. But Dacorda was not a connoisseur and drank greedily. In a few minutes, the bottle was nearly empty. Zerlich pretended to drink, but Carroll noticed that he put away little.

Fenmayer was full of red wine and aggression. Perhaps because he was jealous of Dacorda's quickly acquired reputation for toughness, he had taken a dislike to him. He started to peer threateningly at Dacorda, like a young bull challenging a rival in a pasture. He made remarks in German, which Dacorda did not understand, and which amused his friends. Carroll leaned over and warned him in a low voice, with ill result.

"I'm scared of nobody," Fenmayer said. He rose, unbuckled his belt, slipped off his tunic. He stood before Dacorda, fists clenched, parading his powerful arms and massive shoulders.

"What's eating him?" Dacorda wondered.

"Nothing, he's soused," Carroll put in.

"Says he wants to fight you," Zerlich explained.

"He's just a kid." Dacorda smiled.

"All the Germans think he's pretty good," said Zerlich. "Gianella told him you hit harder than anyone he knew of, and he said he'd take you on and lick you."

"That's only his side of the story," said Dacorda.

Very deliberately, he deposited his képi on the table, pushed his chair back to give himself room, stood up.

"All right, buddy. Come and get it!"

Fenmayer did not understand the words, but he could not mistake the challenge. His eyes blazed fiercely, his lips drew back on strong teeth, and he stepped forward. Dacorda did not move until he dodged a swinging right that would have cracked an oak beam. Then his feet parted, his torso swayed.

The punch was not a swing, and it was not a hook. But it caught Fenmayer on the side of the chin, a half-inch from the tip. It did the trick. Dacorda was seated and had replaced the képi on his head before Fenmayer hit the floor. Gianella, laughing, hoisted him on his chair. Dacorda rubbed his right knuckles with the tip of his fingers after casually dipping them in the brandy.

"Wide open," he commented.

THE momentary hush ended; the conversation, the music and the singing resumed. Fenmayer opened his eyes, and Gianella made him understand that he had had his chance and lost. The big boy cried with humiliation. Dacorda reached over and patted his knee.

"Say, Jack, tell him he doesn't need to feel so bad. Say he's a good kid, and I'll show him how it's done later. Tell him I used to be a pro."

Carroll nodded, and consoled Fenmayer with a glamorous yarn concerning Dacorda. As it cost him not a

thing, he declared that his friend had been middleweight champion of the world. And Fenmayer, very flattered, shook hands.

After an hour, some of the customers began to leave, to make it to camp before nine o'clock. The others trusted to the speed of their legs to get in under the wire before the bugle sounded. Another bottle of cognac followed the first. Dacorda was very happy.

"I'm going out for a minute," he said. "I'll be back for a last swig, then we'll lam back to camp."

Carroll saw him weave his way between the tables, go into the yard. He noted that Zerlich was staring after him. The accordion was playing "Volga," and the Legionnaires sang the German verses written for that tune in the Corps. Carroll was uneasy.

"I'm going to look for Dacorda," he said.

"He's all right," Zerlich said. "Have a drink."

"In a minute," Carroll retorted. He went out.

At first, the yard appeared pitch black, then the glow cast by the open door permitted Carroll to discern men moving, milling, in a corner of the enclosure. Dacorda was in the middle of the group. Carroll rushed to his help.

His friend's face had been covered with a cloth, to stifle his shouts, and he was kicking savagely at the men holding him. Moroccan *Tirailleurs*. There were five of them. Obviously intending to rob the Legionnaire, they were careful not to hurt him to avoid investigation. No attention would be paid to a theft, but a murder would arouse resentment.

Carroll kicked the nearest Moroccan. He spun the next one, and punched him. A tingle of pain ran up his elbow; he knew he had struck solidly. The man howled, staggered and raced after his companions, already through the gate and in the street.

Then all was quiet in the yard, and the music and singing came loud and clear from inside. Dacorda was pulling off the sack on his head.

"Told you not to flash your roll," Carroll snapped.

"So you did, so you did!" Dacorda struck a match, scanned the ground. "First thing I did was to toss my pocketbook back here somewhere. Here it is!" He replaced the wallet in his pocket. "They hung on to me like dogs—" He swore. "They got it, they got it!"

"What?"

"My scapular. That's why they tore my shirt open." Dacorda was silent a moment, then blurted out, "You know damn well what they got! How did they know I had it if you didn't tell them? You dirty skunk!"

"Me? I told them you had—"

"Who else?"

"Are you calling me a thief?"

"You know damn well what you are!"

Carroll lost his head. He had helped Dacorda and was insulted in return. He moved instantly. He struck the other across the mouth, and the fight was started.

Neither of them could see clearly; they shifted for position in the dim light. This probably save Carroll from a quick and ignominious knockout like Fenmayer's. He outweighed Dacorda by twenty-five or thirty pounds and was taller and had inches of reach on him. But the short man was a sheaf of springy muscles and knew his business.

When Dacorda grew accustomed to the poor light, his blows began to come more precisely, mostly to the body. Carroll was neither soft nor timid, could box as well as the average. But he was growing sick and dizzy from stomach punishment.

Fortunately for him, a flashlight swept on them from a few feet away. Behind it gleamed the brass buttons and gold chevrons of the patrol sergeant.

"Attention!"

Carroll obeyed instantly. So did Dacorda.

"What's going on?"

"Just a friendly argument, Sergeant," said Carroll.

"Oh, it's you! And Dacorda? I wondered when you Americans would come to blows. It never fails. A tradition, eh?"

"Sure, Sergeant."

"Well, Carroll, you've done enough to him." The sergeant swept the light on Dacorda's face. It was cut and bleeding. His own blows, more effiicient and dangerous, had left few visible bruises on his opponent. "Now, you two, shake hands."

Dacorda shook his head.

"I'm through with you, Carroll. And if you think you got anything, you're wrong. That scapular was blessed for luck, that's all."

"I tell you I had nothing to do with this."

"You tried to take my picture this afternoon. Then this happens. I'm wise to you."

"He won't make peace, Sergeant," Carroll declared.

"All right. Carroll, you come back to camp with us. I'll inform the captain, who'll see that you don't get to town together. Dacorda, see that you're in time to answer the roll. After the start you made, it would be foolish to get punished."

Carroll marched back with the patrol, puzzled and angry.

The following morning, Carroll was assigned to a special chore, the shaping of heavy stones into blocks for the construction of a blockhouse. He watched for a chance to speak privately to Zerlich, who was on a wheelbarrow detail.

"Did Dacorda tell you anything about what happened last night?"

"He said you doublecrossed him."

"How? What about?"

"He didn't explain."

"He thinks I got those natives to rob him? Is that what you mean?"

"He does."

"And what did you say to him?"

"Nothing, I kept my mouth shut."

"You're a friend!" Carroll said sarcastically.

"Well, Dacorda's scapular was stolen Three of us saw it. Gianella is out of the question, so am I."

"Why would I want it?"

"Dacorda thinks you believe he's hidden something inside. He asked me a lot of questions, told me that as I spoke good German I should find out whether you had been in the Legion as long as you claim, and if you had had communications with the American Consulate. I asked. You did get a couple of letters."

"I lost my passport, reported it and they wrote me."

"All I could tell Dacorda was that you had received official mail. That seemed to worry him a lot. He says that they thought a guy fresh from America would make him suspicious so they got you, already in the Legion, to investigate him."

"Who's 'they' that hired me?"

"The cops, I guess."

"Do you think I'm a stoolpigeon, too?"

"That's none of my business."

Zerlich was off with his load, and Carroll plied hammer and chisel a while. Zerlich suspected him of being an informer. It was a stupid mess. The attack on Dacorda must have been a coincidence, because he flashed his money so often. Carroll decided to test Zerlich's friendship.

"We're off-duty this afternoon. Want to go for a swim?"

"No. I'm going with Dacorda." Zerlich wiped his face, shrugged. "Listen, you're a nice enough guy, but I've been a friend of Dacorda's almost a year. You know plenty of people."

"I get it," Carroll concluded. "You're off me, he's off me. That makes it unanimous."

He turned indifferently, resumed work. But he was irritated. The insult was double, first to accuse him of betraying a friend, second, to suspect him of being disloyal to a Legionnaire. The suspicion that he was a police informer, willing to sell a comrade for blood-money, was serious. If the rumor spread in the company, he wouldn't be very popular.

He was off duty after lunch.

He found a man he had known in a hill station north of Midelt, a *Spahi*, regular cavalryman, named Moulai ben Brahim. Carroll and he had hunted together, and had become good friends. Ben Brahim listened to his relation of the robbery, nodding several times, his lean, brown fingers tugging at his black beard thoughtfully.

"And what can I do for you, Brother?"

"The man I hit must have a mark on his face today. All of them belonged to the Second Battalion of the Sixty-Eighth Moroccan Regiment. I noticed their collar badges. Maybe you could locate him, and give me a chance to talk it over."

"I'll find him, Allah willing."

Ben Brahim reported back by two o'clock. He had found a man with a bruised face among the Tirailleurs who admitted that he had been struck by a Legionnaire during a row. Ben Brahim explained that he had thought it best not to reveal that Carroll wished to see him, for in that case, Moktar ou Hannoun would have become suspicious.

Therefore, he had suggested that if Moktar had any money to spend, he should join Ben Brahim and two other cavalrymen to play cards. To avoid interference, the game would be held in a small deserted hut a couple of miles away from camp, almost on the line of the advanced posts. Moktar accepted. Carroll could follow, and in the isolated building, no one would come to disturb them.

"He will not talk easily," Ben Brahim warned.

Carroll gathered a few friends, among them Gianella and Fenmayer. One never knew. They would serve as aids if needed, as witnesses otherwise.

"I'll try to get the scapular back, if I can," Carroll outlined. "In any case, I'll get him to say before all of you that the attack was his own idea and not planned by me."

"Dacorda's crazy!" Fenmayer said.

"He's worried sick. I better prove to him that he's all right."

IT WAS nearly three o'clock when Ben Brahim and two of his comrades left camp with a Tirailleur who sported a magnificent black eye. The Legionnaires followed at a distance, and found the four squatted around a folded blanket. Moktar was shuffling the cards. A brass kettle in which tea was being brewed was on a small fire in a corner of the room.

When he saw Carroll, whom he probably recognized, Moktar sought to rise. Ben Brahim restrained him, and spoke in Arabic.

"There will be no threats of police and jail. The Legionnaires want to speak as between men and man."

Fenmayer stood in the doorway. The Spahis went and sat against a far wall, unconcerned. Carroll sat down facing Moktar, who was a young chap about twenty-eight years old, with a brown, resolute face and steady, fearless eyes.

"You understand French?"

"Yes. I've been in the Army seven years."

"That's fine. Now, where did you get that eye?"

"You know."

"Last night, in the yard of the Moulin Rouge?"

"Yes," Moktar admitted. "But I've been promised there would be no police and no prison."

"That's right. We'll handle that ourselves. But we want the truth. Who was with you?"

"I cannot talk about others."

"You're right," Carroll conceded. He liked Moktar's refusal to betray his accomplices. "Why did you attack the Legionnaire? To rob him, eh?"

"Yes."

"What did you take from him?"

"We could not find his bills, although we knew he had a lot. But we took change from his trouser pockets, and a little gold chain with a Christian amulet at one end. Here it is." Moktar produced the slender chain.

Carroll took it with a smile. He examined the cross hanging from the chain, which formed a small box. He opened it with a thumb nail. Inside was a minute white sliver, which Gianella said was a holy relic.

"There was nothing else in this?"

"No."

"You've heard, all of you? Now, Moktar, did you know me to speak to?"

"No. I know you are the one who hit me last night. Before that, I had seen you once or twice, at the cafe, with other men. But I never spoke."

"Did I tell you my friend had money, a gold chain? Did I suggest that you rob him?"

"Never."

"You swear it by Allah?"

"By Allah, I swear it."

"That's a good oath, and settles the matter," Carroll declared. "You fellows come to see Dacorda with me."

"A minute," Gianella broke in. "I'd seen that chain, too. We might as well find out who told this chap what Dacorda had under his shirt."

"Answer, Moktar."

"Somebody told me."

"Who?"

"I promised to keep quiet."

Ben Brahim drew Carroll aside, whispered for a few minutes. The American shook his head. "I wouldn't go as far as that—"

"But Moktar would in your place, and he doesn't know you wouldn't. It'll frighten him. Tell him, anyway."

"Take off your boots," Carroll ordered, returning to Moktar.

"There's nothing hidden in them."

"Take them off!"

Moktar removed his army boots. He wore no socks.

"Unless you tell us who gave you the tip about the gold chain, two of us will hold you, while one pours boiling water from that kettle over your feet. Make up your mind within two minutes."

"I'll report to my officer!"

"Your feet will be boiled, anyway. And there's only your word against us five. We'll swear you did it yourself while drunk." He wondered what he would do if Moktar called his bluff. But torture is not unusual to a Moroccan, and Moktar did not think it was a joke.

"The Syrian who runs the cafe told me."

"How did he know?"

"He didn't tell me."

"Tell us how the Syrian happened to speak to you about robbing my friend. Tell all from beginning to end."

Moktar nodded.

"It came about this way: I and a few friends went to the cafe last night. The Syrian has known me a long time. He called me behind the bar and asked me if I wanted to make some easy money.

"I said I did. He said all we had to do was gang on a Legionnaire he would point out, when we got a chance. Even as he spoke, you came in. You sat down, there were three of you, next to the young Legionnaire who now stands at the door, who got up and tried to fight your friend. He was stunned immediately.

"When the Syrian told us it was that man we had to attack, we hesitated. Then he said we could keep all the mon-

ey on him for ourselves, if we only gave him a chain of gold which the man had around his neck. He would give us two hundred and fifty francs for it.

"We were a little scared of your friend, because he fought so well. But there was the money, and we were five. We followed him into the yard. We could not find his wallet, but we did find the chain and some loose change. Then you came, and we fled into the street.

"When you quarreled later, we entered the cafe—through the rear door. I showed the Syrian the gold chain, and he said it was what he wanted. He gave me the two hundred and fifty francs."

"How do you happen to have the chain today?"

"The Syrian was not acting for himself. A Legionnaire came over, and looked at the chain. He opened the locket, as you just did, and there was nothing there except what you saw. He seemed very disappointed, asked us if we had not opened it before and lost something. We said no, which was the truth.

"So the fellow gave the Syrian five hundred francs and said he might use him again. We understood then that we had taken all that risk for half the money promised. But there was nothing we could do against the Syrian thief.

"The Legionnaire looked at the chain a long time, then said he didn't want to keep it. The Syrian wouldn't have it in his place, because it might cause trouble if found. So they gave it to me. I didn't dare to try to sell it so soon after the robbery. That's all."

"The Legionnaire wasn't me?" Carroll insisted.

"No."

"Which was he?"

"He paid for my silence."

Carroll by this time would have gone any length to satisfy his curiosity. Dacorda had been partly right, there was a traitor in the company, spying on him. A suspicion he had dimly felt for several days was taking shape.

"Who was he?"

"He is tall and pretty old."

"Do I know him?"

"He sat with you and the man we robbed, last night."

"Zerlich!" Carroll turned to the others. "Dacorda will kill him!"

Fenmayer shrugged, Gianella smiled.

"Take your shoes and beat it," Carroll ordered Moktar. When the Moroccan had gone, happy to get off so easily, the American turned to Ben Brahim.

"Thank you, Brother. I offer nothing for the service. But ask when needed." The cavalryman understood, and he took his friend away.

"Those men will not talk about what happened here," Carroll resumed, as the Legionnaires grouped around him. "Now, what do we do?"

"What's there to be done?" Fenmayer wondered, "except clear yourself and let the punk take what's coming. I never liked that old fellow."

"You're very young," Gianella said gently.

Carroll said, "Whatever Dacorda is hiding must be important. He'll be sore because he had trusted Zerlich like a brother. Sure, we can talk to him and we're not responsible for anything that happens. But is it doing a good turn to Dacorda to tell him something that'll drive him crazy and get him into a lot of trouble?"

"No," Fenmayer admitted. "But what's right's right."

"How do we know what's right? Sure, we have Dacorda's story of what he did. He says he married a couple of times. But what we just found out about Zerlich changes everything. He's followed Dacorda to the Legion, evidently, and didn't arrest him, even if the fellow admits the crime. That bigamy story must be a fake, and it may be murder."

"He's a Legionnaire. That's all we have to know."

"And what do you call Zerlich? Isn't he a Legionnaire?"

"He's a rat, that's what he is."

"And Dacorda may be a murderer."

"He's a Legionnaire." Fenmayer was stubborn.

"Looks to me as if it wasn't an ordinary crime," Carroll pointed out. "It costs a lot of money to cross the ocean, and it takes a lot of determination for a man to enlist in the Legion to keep track of another. Somebody supplied that money and Zerlich showed that determination. It's all right to say Zerlich's a stoolpigeon, but maybe not. He may be doing his job."

"Carroll's right, Fenmayer," the other German put in.

"I'll agree to whatever he says," Fenmayer said. "What's the plan now?"

"The four of us will take Zerlich aside and tell him what we found out. If he has a satisfactory explanation, we keep out of his business. If not, we tell Dacorda."

THE four went back to camp. In a street of the Legion sector, they saw Zerlich and Dacorda walking aimlessly. While the others kept some distance away, Carroll went up to them. Dacorda looked at him, turned his head aside and spat on the ground.

"I want to speak to you, Zerlich."

"I have nothing to say to you, Carroll. I told you where we stood."

"I have a message from a friend of yours."

"Why doesn't he come himself?"

"He's busy. You made a deal with him yesterday." Carroll held the older man's eyes. "And he claims it's now worth more than five hundred francs to him."

Zerlich's glance did not waver, he did not start. But a greenish palor spread slowly over his sallow face. Carroll was forced to admire him for the careless laugh he contrived.

"I should have expected this," he said casually.

"Doing business with this bum?" Dacorda challenged.

"I seem to be. Sorry. Explain later." Zerlich fell in step with Carroll. "Don't mention names, places. It's important. I'd sooner have you find out than some foolish fellow who'd talk."

They stopped by the three others, who had joined a group of Legionnaires gathered before a notice fastened to the facade of the company's office shack, a large sheet, handsomely written by a prideful clerk.

The Legionnaires whose names are listed below will report tonight, immediately after mess, to Sub-Lieutenant d'Argoval's quarters, for special duty.

Carroll glanced at the dozen names as far down as "C" saw that he was not included. The written announcement, somewhat unusual in the field, aroused much curiosity.

"Zerlich's on there, the last listed," Gianella observed. "You have any idea of what it's about?"

"No."

"We better hurry. Mess is at five." Carroll led the way outside the barbed-wire enclosure surrounding the tents.

"Well, what's the idea of the four?" Zerlich smiled grimly. "A court-martial?"

"Call it that. Here's what we found out." Carroll related his interview with Moktar tersely. "I've got witnesses and the scapular to prove it. Before we tell Dacorda, we thought we'd listen to your side of it. Fair enough?"

"Fair, but awkward," Zerlich nodded.

"Can't be helped. After all, you encouraged him to suspect me. That's a dirty trick."

Zerlich lighted a cigarette. He was very cool, poised, and did not appear

shamed. He replied in German, not the colloquial tongue he had employed until then, but the language of a cultured man. It was a moment, and somehow a dignity touched it.

"Gentlemen, I understand your suspicions. I must thank you for consulting me before informing Legionnaire Dacorda. I see that I have an explanation to supply if I do not wish to be exposed. As I am among you, it is most natural that I should be under your rules and traditions. Later, I shall be glad to have all know why I am here. You have guessed part of the truth. In the meanwhile, would you oblige me further by permitting me to reveal my intention to one of you only? A secret shared by four men is not a secret. It is evident that Carroll, whom I have most offended, should be the one picked. Will you rely on his judgment as to whether you should warn Dacorda or remain silent a while?"

The three glanced at Carroll, then nodded. Zerlich thanked them once more, and led the American aside. They walked slowly toward the river, across the naked plain where the afternoon sun was reflected redly in the drying puddles scattered on the drying red earth.

"My job's important enough, Carroll, to excuse any annoyance which I've inflicted upon you." Zerlich used English now. "I enlisted in the Legion to carry it out, taking the chance that I could legally get out as soon as my task was over. I'm Austrian born, brought up in America, that's true. Forget the rest of my story. It was cooked up for a purpose.

"Of course, Zerlich is no more my name than Dacorda is his. More or less unofficially, I'm an agent for the National Jewelers' Protective Association and a couple of insurance companies. Dacorda is a nice guy, but he is an accomplice of thieves and a receiver of stolen goods.

"Have you ever heard of James Barrister? You haven't, because you are not in my business. But I doubt that there's a plainclothes man anywhere who couldn't give you an oral portrait of the chap. He is, or was, a jewel thief, a genius in his line.

"About two years ago, he worked with a handsome young fellow, who interested a lady old enough to be his mother. That was Mrs. Tauberal. You read about that in the papers, didn't you? They took stuff from her—diamonds, emeralds, pearls, insured for more than five hundred grand. He waited for things to cool down, didn't need to hurry, he had plenty of other jack. We knew he had the stuff cached somewhere. But where?

"Old Man Tauberal reported the robberies. The gigolo squealed on Barrister. We found him in a hotel at Palm Beach, and picked him up for questioning. We locked him up until his lawyer got busy. We had a good case, with witnesses to crack his alibi. But we didn't want to jail him as much as we wanted to recover the stuff. So we pretended to have no proof, and he was released. That was to make him confident, understand?

"We had guys following him whom he spotted as we'd planned he should, because we had an agent working into his gang. We had to divert Barrister's attention. It took the fellow five months to get anywhere.

"One day, when Barrister pretended to be a stamp broker in a small office in New York, he managed to get away from the fellow tailing him. Our informer phoned that Barrister was in New Jersey, meeting some important people. We only checked on the facts, for we were certain he never took the stuff along on a first conference.

"Our spy then reported that another meeting had been arranged. Remember, it was serious business, not disposing of a dime's worth of peanuts. Nearly a million involved. There was a man from

Amsterdam, another from London, big time fences come over on special business.

"We found the place, a big house once used as a fancy summer hotel back in the hills close to Pennsylvania. Barrister had rented it through a friend.

"On the day they met, we were on the job. We waited until Barrister had gone in, then counted his friends as they arrived. They all wore knickers and sweaters, had golf bags, and came in splendid cars. Looked more like a lot of Wall Street executives on a week-end than crooks. We had a field telephone rigged up in the woods for emergency. There were three New York detectives, and a couple of bulls from Newark, some State troopers, and a local cop who knew the grounds and the house.

"Barrister, we noticed, took in his golf bag. The others didn't. So we guessed what he carried in it. We were pretty excited, because Old Man Tauberal had offered a big reward, and there was money from other sources involved.

"We had taken care to have all the roads guarded in case somebody slipped out when we rushed in. A man would have to use a car to get clear, and the operative at the telephone had the license numbers of the cars and would report any car leaving to every trap along the roads.

"We were about to go ahead when an old delivery truck rattles into the yard. The local cop told us that the driver with a load of stuff in a big basket was Mike Melano, who ran a speakeasy. He was probably bringing up liquor for the party inside. He said that Melano's all right, had never done a crooked thing in his life except peddle booze.

"The cop said Melano fought professionally as Battling Melano, welterweight, and was good enough to be on four Madison Square Garden cards, in prelims. Everybody liked him. But we had something bigger to go after than a hick-town bootlegger. So we let him go in and out, carrying baskets, cases and crates, about four times.

"He stayed longer on the last trip, and we thought they were paying him for the junk he brought. He came out just when the guy at the telephone told us that everything's set all along the line, and that a mosquito couldn't get through unseen. We decided to let him go, because we wanted to keep things quiet. So, as he pulled away in his truck, we signaled the troopers to let him pass.

"As soon as he was out of sight, we walked in on them inside.

"There were nine men there, and not a gun in the place. Barrister smiled, asking us to have a drink. We pulled the place to pieces looking for the junk, and find nothing. Nobody was left except Melano, and we figured that Barrister was too smart to hand over a million to a man he doesn't know. We were *too* smart.

"There was no use stalling. Barrister was held for trial. We tried to sweat out of the others where the stuff was hidden. Barrister had told them the stuff was in the house, that they would see it. But they couldn't give us more dope than that. They said nothing whatever had happened.

"We had to make a deal with Barrister. We told him that he was due for a life stretch, if we bring out his former convictions. We told him we can get him ten to twenty, which means seven years with time off for good behavior, if it's worth a million to him not to stay inside for keeps. We showed him the proof we have, list our witnesses. He's no damned fool; he knew we had him. He cracked and told us his story.

"Mike Melano had come in with a case, and although he seemed sort of stupid, he had noticed a lot of cops moving about on his way up. He spoke of that to Barrister without knowing

it meant a thing to him. Barrister guessed what was up. As we had let him go in Florida, he thought he could beat the case against him. Also, he knew he might make a deal if things got bad. Very few people hate a million dollars' worth.

"So he approached this Melano—to take five thousand dollars down and twenty thousand later, to take the stuff away. Barrister handed him a slip with the name of a safe-deposit vault, made him swear on the Cross that he won't squeal. And Melano took the stuff away under a cloth in his big basket. He walked right out under our noses—and we let him drive away!

"Barrister also told him who to tip off that he had carried out instructions. Must have been his lawyer, though we never found out, because Barrister had information, even in jail. Mike Melano had been scared to go to the place named on the slip, afraid it would be watched. So he had kept the stuff for a couple of days, and had it planted in a vault somewhere. He told Barrister that he had the password and the key, and wanted Barrister to tell him what to do with them, and asked about the twenty grand.

"Barrister told him not to talk to a soul, and suggested that Mike beat it abroad, in case we suspected him. That was before things got hot for Barrister.

"We got to Melano's place in a hurry. But he had been gone a couple of weeks. Barrister co-operated, and reported his address. Mike had gone to Italy. There, our agents found out that he had had some trouble. He was American born, his mother had been Irish, but his old man was Italian, so he could only stay a short time before being put in the army. We traced him to Lyons, France.

"One of our men in France went to him and made a proposition. Melano, he said, wouldn't be arrested, if he turned in the stuff. Then he promised him the twenty thousand if he would tell us where the stuff was kept. Of course, we had investigated on our side, looked up banks and storage-vaults for three hundred miles around New York, compared his signature with writing on thousands of cards. It was a tough job, and got us nowhere.

"Mike Melano told our man he wants to play square with Barrister, that he couldn't betray him. Raising the ante didn't help. Melano wasn't selling. In his way, he was being honest and that's a fact. He said he had sworn on the Cross to keep the secret.

"The next day, he slipped away from our man and went to Paris. I asked to be sent over to France, because I had my own idea of the job. One thing Melano must have kept with him right along was the key to the safe-deposit box he had hired. You can always trace a key. They have numbers, you know, and once you get hold of one, it's sure you'll find the lock it fits.

"I found Melano in Paris. He was like a kid with a new toy spending his money, what he had left. He'd given his grandmother in Italy two thousand dollars! I didn't let him see me, but I went through his baggage in the hotel. I found nothing important. I waited until he was taking a bath. He had nothing with him except a bathrobe, and I've been in the pockets three times. I searched his suit, his shirt, his tie, his collar, his socks, his shoes, everything. I even looked in his fountain pen and opened the case of his watch.

"But no key, although I knew he had it. A key worth a million to somebody, and fifty thousand to me, which means a house in the country, a fine car, retirement—the key to heaven, Carroll, the key to the sky!

"I get to thinking that he'd hid the key somewhere in Paris. Maybe in a bank, maybe at the Express Office, where he got mail from time to time,

letters that Barrister wrote for us, asking him to come back and turn in the stuff. But Melano was wise that the cops were pressing Barrister, and swore not to obey any such orders. He didn't fall for the bait.

"I kept out of his sight, but never lost him. Then, one morning, he gets into a row with a big Swede living in the same hotel, over a girl. His size fooled the squarehead, who charged into him. Melano worked on him four or five seconds, split his eye, knocked out a few teeth, laid him like a hall rug. The Swede cracked his head when he dropped, and the police were called in.

"There were two of them, and Melano started on them. He knew he was in wrong, and beat it from the hotel without taking a thing. The police didn't know where to look for him, but I'd been following him days and I did. He was in a restaurant near Les Halles thirty minutes after. And he went from there and enlisted in the Foreign Legion. The owner of the place, an Italian, told him that was the safest place.

"All right, all I have to do is enlist in the Legion. I have come too far to lose him. Don't have to worry about my wife and three kids, my salary goes on, because that was the agreement when I left. And with official help from the States, I know that I can get out when the job's done. I didn't arrange anything in advance with the French, being afraid somebody would talk.

"I asked where and when that draft of recruits for the Legion was going. They told me Fort St. Jean, in Marseilles, in three days.

"So I decided not to enlist in the same place, which might make him suspicious. I took a train for Dijon and enlisted there. Almost had to cry my way in, too, because I'm no chicken and there are varicose veins on my legs. Well, our bunch went to Lyons, where it was put with the gang from Paris. I saw Melano, who calls himself Dacorda, right away.

"But I didn't talk to him. I talked to another man, about the States. And Melano, sort of homesick, started talking in English. He tried to explain why he was in, after my sad story, and without his knowing it, I made up that story about a couple of wives for him. The fellow knows how to fight, but he'll never be a good liar. Shows everything he feels, as you know.

"In the Legion, I nearly went crazy keeping in the same outfit with him. I didn't dare use official pull in asking for transfers. I've kept in the same company, but never in the same room, so I can't get a line on that key. Once or twice, I almost lost him, when he was sent to some other place. When the officers turned me down for a transfer, I slipped a hundred francs to this scribe, five hundred to another, fifty here and twenty there, until my name was on a list and I followed Dacorda.

"Then we were sent to Morocco, for fighting service. I didn't like the idea. And I was getting to like Dacorda. Except for not telling me his real story—he keeps his oath and shoots square with Barrister and his own soul—he loves me like a father. But there's fifty thousand dollars in it for me, and I'm a family man. And it's my job.

"When he went over the cliff, the other day, I was raving mad. I've been told those hillmen strip the bodies before chopping them up. I got scared that key would be lost where no one will ever find it. Lucky for me, you tagged along. You worked for nothing, and that risk was worth all I'm after, believe me. Then I saw that scapular and that cross. I thought right away that it's where he keeps it. You could, if you filed the guard down to fit. Even with part of the number missing, the make would help locate the box. They have records.

"So I used some more money, and got the Syrian to have him robbed. There's nothing in the scapular. When he suspects that it's a put-up job, what

am I to do? Lose fifty thousand to play the hero for you?"

"No," Carroll admitted. He had listened to Zerlich with intense interest and growing admiration. The old chap spoke simply of the chances he had taken, of danger and fatigue accepted, to carry out the job. Service in the Legion was not easy for a man in the forties used to city life, fine hotels and good food. Sudden death for a married man with children and a comfortable home waiting for him was not a good prospect!

"What are you going to do, now, Carroll?"

"Tell the others to keep quiet, that your explanation is all right with me. And I'll take what's coming from Dacorda." He laughed. "He's a pretty good guy at that, isn't he?"

"That's what hurts," Zerlich admitted. "He was tempted by a lot of money and is no real crook. He'd die for me, he'd die for you, for anybody he likes. But I've got to get that key."

"I understand," Carroll granted. "Maybe you could speak to the captain and have him searched thoroughly."

"If that was all there was to it, we'd have done that in France. But suppose he has left it somewhere? He wouldn't tell. This way, he may give me a clue sometime, in a friendly talk. Or I may see the address when he writes to pay for the vault. See?"

"That may take a long time."

"I'll stick it out," Zerlich snapped. "Now, how can I square myself with him about this friend and the money you talked of?"

"Easily," Carroll pointed out. "You tell him you wanted to desert and propositioned a guy who wants more than you can give."

"That's a good idea," Zerlich admitted. "Listen, Carroll, I'll not forget what you're doing. When I collect—"

"Forget it, I'm not in your business," Carroll cut him short. He was sincere. Zerlich was a detective disguised as a Legionnaire, dealing with a man he judged a crook. It was all right for him to disregard the code. But he, Carroll, was a genuine Legionnaire. To prevent further temptation, for turning down a few thousand dollars which would have helped him considerably later was not easy, he changed the subject. "Better go back and eat. You have to report to d'Argoval after mess."

"Have you any idea what for?"

"No. One of the others on that list was a tinsmith. You're down on records as a dealer in hardware and a plumber in civilian life. Maybe you'll be asked to work on some job—pipe connections for the new blockhouse they're building, likely enough."

"That's probably it. Thanks and so long, Carroll."

THE "soup" bugle sounded. Carroll joined his friends, and as they ate he explained that Zerlich must be left alone. The matter was serious but concerned only the two involved. They stormed questions at him, and he promised that he would tell them as soon as he could, writing if they had separated.

After the meal, the Legionnaires summoned by d'Argoval were seen filing into the sub-lieutenant's tent. They remained inside for fifteen minutes, then emerged looking very important, very serious, and refusing information.

"Secret orders."

But they were inwardly elated and proud, with the exception of Zerlich, who looked worried. The others watched as the men busied themselves cleaning automatic pistols issued by the officer. Carroll guessed that they had been picked for a special and dangerous undertaking. Nettled that he had not been chosen, he felt that he would have been more use than Zerlich, a comparatively feeble novice.

He was startled when the detective,

who had avoided him to show his sympathy to Dacorda, sought him out.

"I know you won't repeat this," Zerlich started. "I'm included on a job where there's ten chances of being bumped off for one of coming back. That young fellow gets us in there and smiles at us. He says, 'I've been selected for a dangerous mission. I knew that if I asked for volunteers, the whole company would stand up. I'd hurt somebody's feelings by not picking them. You are all Legionnaires, all ready for sacrifice and service. So I picked the names out of a hat!' And he looked as if he was being good to us."

"I'll replace you," Carroll said instantly.

He knew that d'Argoval was greedy for exciting jobs, and that following him tonight would be exciting. Carroll did not worry about danger. He had volunteered for several dangerous missions and come back alive. Moreover, he was on the list for sergeants, and had been held up because of a spree in Meknes. This stunt might wipe that from the slate.

"Can it be done?" Zerlich asked.

"Maybe. Let's talk to d'Argoval."

But the sub-lieutenant was asleep, resting for his trip that night, and the orderly would not allow them to enter. Zerlich suggested that they see the captain. Carroll, who knew Barbaroux, was doubtful. But he was eager to go, and there was a bare chance that it could be arranged.

The captain was in his office, the plank shack beside his tent. There were two clerks with him. The thick-set, red-faced officer was writing a report laboriously, fortifying himself with drinks of anisette from a bottle on his folding table. His massive face lifted. Carroll, who spoke excellent French, was spokesman. He gave the purpose of their call.

"No," Barbaroux snapped.

"Captain, I—"

"A thousand times, no!" The captain launched on a tirade. "When a Legionnaire has the honor to be selected for a dangerous mission, he should be pleased, by God, he should be pleased! If he isn't, he should have the decency not to admit it. Yes, you, the tall chap! You may be killed tonight. Why did you come to the Legion, if life was so dear?"

"I must explain—"

"This is the most preposterous request, the most ignoble scene I have heard of in seventeen years of Legion. Carroll, you have a right to take advantage of anything to obtain what you wish. I'm sorry I can't grant you the privilege you ask. But a Legionnaire does what he is asked. That's discipline. Dismissed!"

"Better tell him," Zerlich said.

"Legionnaire Zerlich has reasons to lay before you, Captain."

"A Legionnaire never reasons. He obeys."

"Yet—"

"Shut up and go, both of you."

"Tell him," Zerlich insisted.

"Legionnaire Zerlich is a police official on a mission, Captain."

"Following a man in my company?"

"It's his duty, Captain."

"Duty?" Barbaroux understood the weight of that word better than most. "Right, it's his duty. Zerlich, your credentials, please."

Zerlich produced two letters and a card.

"They're foreign papers," the captain declared. "I can't accept them."

"I haven't revealed my identity to the French police, Captain."

"That's too bad," Barbaroux said softly. "Officially, I can't recognize you as what you claim to be, on your mere word. You understand it would make it too easy to malinger. Any man could come to me and say he's on a mission and must be spared."

"Is there anything to be done, Captain?" Zerlich insisted.

"There's always something to be done

about anything," Barbaroux was dangerously calm. "You must write me a letter outlining your mission, your reasons for deeming it more important than your duty as a Legionnaire. I shall transmit it to the battalion commander, who will send it to the Colonel. In due course, it will reach Brigade Headquarters, then Divisional Headquarters, then Army Headquarters. You follow me?"

"Yes, Captain."

"It will be turned over to the Ministry of War. Which will dispatch it to the Police, who will send it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy in Washington will handle it. I do not know the routine of your American offices, but ultimately, they will reply to our Embassy, and that reply will come back to me by the same route."

The Legionnaires understood that Barbaroux was joking.

"That will take time," Zerlich protested.

"Oh, no more than a year," Barbaroux assured him gently.

"I can wire the American Consulate in Casablanca."

"Can they identify you, confirm your statements, immediately?"

"They'll cable, and the answer will come tomorrow afternoon."

"Sorry, but you are on duty tonight. And you'll have to go. It would humiliate the whole company if a man hesitated." Barbaroux shrugged. "I don't like men in your trade in the Legion, Zerlich. I may be prejudiced, but I'm a Legionnaire, first and last. The answer was no and is no."

Outside, Zerlich stopped. "Who else can we see?"

"Nobody. You have to get the captain's permission to see the major, and all such requests must be asked a day in advance. There is no time."

"Then I've got to go."

"Sure. Barbaroux's nuts on the Legion, and all he cares is how a man acts while in it. He's shielded others before. And we like him for it."

"I'm sick to my stomach," Zerlich grumbled. "I was getting somewhere. Now, everything's spoiled. Those scribes will talk, and Dacorda'll be tipped off."

"Maybe you talked too soon."

"I don't want to get killed without him."

"You may come out alive."

"Small chance. Might as well tell you what the job is. They can't do more to me than is likely to happen. They found out that a big native chief is around here, a guy who deserted from a native regiment and has been training the forces we're fighting. Our bunch is to go inside the enemy's lines tonight, capture him. D'Argoval tells us that the Native Intelligence Service is not sure that this news wasn't given out purposely, to get us to do just what we're doing. We may be ambushed and massacred. Even if discovered accidentally inside their positions, we won't have a chance."

"Never can tell. I'll help you prepare."

The men in the small expedition had been instructed to take the bare bayonet, passed through the belt like a knife, six grenades in a bag, a pistol and a hundred cartridges, also the two quart canteen and a little hardtack. They were forbidden to wear kepis, as the rigid outline of the peak might be spotted even in the darkness. Cloth wound like turbans would replace other headgear. The place chosen as a goal was a tiny hamlet in the hills, fifteen miles to the south.

Zerlich was like a man being made ready for the electric chair. Dacorda stood by and watched, but did not speak, sulking at Carroll's presence. It was evident he still suspected the wrong man. As he had no intimate friends other than Zerlich, he had not as yet heard the rumor spread through the camp by the scribes, to the effect that Zerlich was a detective.

They joined the little detachment as-

sembling in the dusk. Dacorda stepped forward, offered his hard palm to his old friend.

"Wish I was going along with you, Pop," he said.

"So do I," Zerlich touched the hand and smiled in self-derision.

"Going to be tough, from the way you look."

"Plenty tough, Mike."

"Well, wish you luck."

"Thanks."

"Don't take any wooden nickels, Pop."

"I won't, Mike."

Dacorda's eyes moistened suddenly. He did not wait for the detachment to go, but left to hide his emotion. Carroll escorted Zerlich to the fringe of the camp. There, the old Legionnaire gave him an envelope. Around him, the majority of the group were asking a like service from their friends.

"In case—you know. Might add a couple of lines yourself. How it happened, why—might get her a small pension."

"I won't need to," Carroll said to console him.

Sub-Lieutenant d'Argoval called the roll, separated his followers from their friends to avoid last minute substitutions or unwanted volunteers.

"Let's go!" he concluded.

Night fell. The stars were out. The camp fires glowed behind the detachment, and in the hills, very remote, blinked other flames, threatening, hostile. For a few minutes, Carroll stood with others who had escorted old comrades to the jumping-off place, and listened to the dwindling footsteps.

They grew fainter and fainter. Then they could be heard no longer.

III

THE routine of the camp was not changed in any visible particular, probably to avoid discovery of the expedition by emissaries the hillmen sent to the city to glean information. Legionnaires and troopers of other units were permitted to go into the town as usual after sunset. But the men in Barbaroux's company were depressed and sullen, aware that their comrades were plunging deeper and deeper into unknown danger.

Carroll drifted into the Moulin Rouge. He noticed Dacorda, seated alone in a corner of the main room. He was not drinking much, and kept relighting the same cigarette, his eyes lost on space, his fingers drumming against the table.

It was easy to see that he was suffering from loneliness and worry, and Carroll had an impulse to join him. But he knew the man's temper, feared a public rebuff which might force him into a fight. He had several excellent reasons for not clashing with Dacorda. The first was that he liked the man in spite of what had happened, and he frankly admitted to himself that he did not want his body pounded again. When he took a deep breath, he could still feel the effects of the crushing blows inflicted on him.

"Why not call him over here and tell him the truth?" Gianella suggested. "The scribes have talked, and it's all over the battalion that Zerlich's from the police."

"That seems to be the simplest way," Carroll admitted. "But I know he likes the old chap, and somehow I don't want to be there when he finds out."

"Have it your way. Say, this isn't a cafe—it's a graveyard."

The Russian who had played the accordion the night before was present. But his heart was not in his music, and he soon tossed the instrument aside to settle down to steady drinking. Carroll was thinking as they all were, of the Legionnaires following young d'Argoval in the darkness.

Fenmayer relieved his nervous strain by picking a fight with a big teamster from the artillery convoy. He beat him

thoroughly in the courtyard. Only a half-dozen men went as far as the door to watch.

"When will they be back?" a Legionnaire asked.

"Should return to our outposts by dawn if they make it," a veteran replied. "If not—" He drew the edge of his hand across his throat.

"They must have reached the hills by now."

"Just about reached them."

In the section of the Moulin Rouge occupied by the Legionnaires, a dull, crushing silence fell. Card games petered out for want of attention.

It was a few minutes after seven when a sergeant of Legion entered, the chin strap of his kepi snug under his chin, to reveal that he was on duty. He barked for silence and made an announcement.

"Legionnaires of the Second and Fourth Company will report at once to their formations!"

They were on their feet instantly. Carroll buttoned up his tunic, buckled his belt and followed the rest. They started back to camp at a walk, but soon they were running.

The sergeants, already equipped, were waiting.

"Come on, get into full kit and make it snappy. Assembly in five minutes."

The Legionnaires found their guns and ammunition, formed on the esplanade left free between the rows of tents and the shallow defensive trench. In the light of a storm-lantern, they saw the general and a few staff-officers, the major commanding the battalion and the two captains, in animated conversation.

There was something dramatic and moving in this unexpected massing of armed men under the stars. All eyes turned south. But the night there was a black wall, and all the fires they had seen earlier had gone out.

Sergeant-chiefs called the roll. Barbaroux lighted his pipe. He shook hands with the general, with the major, who walked away slowly. Then he stepped to the front of his outfit.

"Attention!" ordered the oldest sergeant.

"Legionnaires!" Barbaroux uttered the word in a tone scarcely louder than the conversational. But there was so much feeling, so much affection in that word that they all stiffened when they heard it. "Legionnaires! Some of our comrades have gone out there. I know that you felt as anxious as I do. We have permission to move forward some distance, to be ready to support our men if they are threatened."

The two companies swung out of camp in columns by threes, at the supple, long pace of the Legion. In a very few minutes, camp and town were behind, the lights dwindling, the sounds muffled. There was an exhilaration in this march into the night, a keen sensation of danger and daring.

All understood the reason for the move. Doubtless, the belief that the report was false had been confirmed, and the high command already knew that Sub-Lieutenant d'Argoval and his group would be in trouble before morning.

The more sanguine among the Legionnaires hoped that they were to be the spearhead of a general night attack. But that was a vain supposition. Carroll understood what was expected of the half-battalion sent out. It was detached to station itself close to the hills, to be ready to greet survivors if any contrived to get back as far as the plain.

There could be no thought of marching nearly four hundred men into hostile hills at night, to fight, in the darkness, foes who knew the ground perfectly. The men of the supporting companies would be like men on a shore, standing by to throw out ropes and life preservers when called for, but forbidden to dive in even to effect rescues.

As a matter of fact, a halt was called

two miles beyond the limits of the cavalry outposts that protected the camp from surprise during the day. The men were urged to sit down, ordered not to smoke.

The nervous strain was beginning. They must remain there and wait, wait until the firing started. Then they would have to wait until the survivors straggled in.

"It's ten o'clock," Sergeant Kulhman said.

The Legionnaires conversed in low voices. There was no laughter. Nothing to do except to wait. Squatted on his heels, gripping his rifle with both hands, Carroll was brooding when a hand touched his wrist.

"That you, Jack?"

"Dacorda?"

"Yeah. How's the kid, eh? I can't stand it hanging around like this, with nobody to talk to. It's awful, this here sitting around with your belly twisting inside of you and not allowed to do anything."

"You'll get used to that. Once, I spent a whole night sitting on my mess-kit, under a pouring rain. There were five of us, lost from a patrol."

"Oh, can that. This is bad enough without your saying it ain't so tough. Think they'll all be bumped off?"

"Some will get back, very likely."

"Think Zerlich will make it?"

"How do I know? I wouldn't bet on him. His legs aren't very strong, and he can't fight a lick, in close. You saw him the other day. The first guy had him down."

"Yeah. It's a crime he has to be a soldier. Nice guy, ain't he? What I mean is—sort of soft and refined, and wise. He makes me feel like I know nothing. He can explain machinery. Ever hear him tell about the stars? He could drive a ship across the ocean, I'll bet."

It wrung Carroll's heart a little to listen to him. Dacorda, a fearless man himself, did not admire courage in others. He did not scorn Zerlich for being timid in action. He was a loyal friend.

"He's smart, I guess."

"I'm sorry about last night, Jack. See, there's something been on my mind a long time, and anything that happens looks like it was a put-up job."

"Forget it."

"Since you've been in the Legion, you must have lost good pals."

"Plenty."

"Does a guy get, well, sort of used to it?"

"It hurts as much each time," Carroll said. "That's one thing you can't get used to. After a while, you get so you don't break down easy and do your grieving inside. That's all."

"Wish we could do something."

THE hours dragged by, eventless. It was one in the morning, one-thirty. Almost at once, the Legionnaire startled. There was a muffled, remote cracking in their ears, scarcely more than a deep vibration in the air. But they all knew what it meant. Guns firing—the attack on their comrades was launched.

"Can't see flashes," Kulhman said. "They got jumped on in a ravine."

After that first rattling discharge, all was quiet for almost fifteen minutes. Then the vibration resumed, clearer, louder. The Legionnaires rose, stood tensely, necks craned.

The deeper reports of Chassepots rumbled through the sharp, lashing detonations of the Mausers. The sounds came from everywhere at once, deformed, prolonged and multiplied by echoes in the hills. More than fifty rifles were in action. D'Argoval and his men must have their hands full.

Legionnaires were being massacred up there, and their comrades had to remain idle.

"You can see the flashes now!"

There were minute, blinking lights on

the slopes, like fireflies darting about on a summer's night. At times, there were only a few, then they formed irregular streaks. Carroll sweated and grunted aloud. Dacorda pressed him with questions.

"Are they coming nearer, Jack? Can you tell the pistols from rifles? Was that a grenade busting?"

"Steady, Legionnaires," Barbaroux advised. "Nothing for us to do for a long time. Steady."

The sergeants took the cue, circulated in the groups, talked to their men. Even this slight illusion of activity eased the strain. But their helplessness weighed on them all like a ghastly burden. Their comrades were being killed, being killed—

Fenmayer started to sob from nervousness. He wept like a small child, with great heaves of his chest and convulsive gasps. He could face hand-to-hand fighting without flinching.

"There they are, *there they are!*"

The emplacement of the little detachment was now designated by the explosions of hand-grenades. The yellower, wider flashes appeared frequently, and could not be mistaken. Carroll knew that if grenades were used, the natives must be crowding the soldiers hard.

In his brain flitted tiny pictures, clear and sharp as etchings, of falling men screaming in the darkness, surrounded by fierce hillmen with knives, hacked and slashed.

It was impossible that some of the group had not succumbed. Maybe d'Argoval was gone, and he would never again see his grave, comforting smile, his boyish, rather awkward gestures. He would never hear the accented English when the sub-lieutenant believed preposterously that he was speaking the best American slang. Maybe Zerlich had dropped.

No, one never grew hardened to it.

The firing ceased abruptly.

"They're done for!"

"No, the natives have lost them in the dark."

The hills were silent and obscure for a long time. Kulhman said it was after four o'clock. The time had seemed to drag like eternity as it passed, but in retrospect, it fled by like a flash. Carroll stepped near the group of officers, listened.

"Intelligent fellow, d'Argoval," Captain Barbaroux was saying. "We studied the map together. On the way up, he must have picked out a couple of good hiding places in case there was a mishap. He's hiding until he can see his way clear. Probably figures we have done just as we did, moved supporting troops close to the hills to gather him in."

"They couldn't have been wiped out, Captain?"

"Nonsense. Legionnaires are not killed off with so little fuss."

He was right. The firing resumed at five. The grenades exploded only at wide intervals. Probably, they were saved for desperate encounters. Fighting from rock to rock, from bush to bush, hanging on doggedly, the isolated Legionnaires must be retreating faster. The flashes were followed by reports of corresponding intensity after a few seconds.

There was no light in the sky as yet, but the night felt somehow less thick. In the darkness, there floated a perceptible, grayish fog, rising like the breath of the soil. Carroll could see the crests of the hills dimly, stenciled across the paling sky. Fenmayer, worn out, had fallen asleep. He was snoring, his big body sprawled face down, face resting on a bent arm.

Dawn—

Faint light was sliding between the hills from the left, and a rose streak fused along the crests, which looked like rusty, nicked blades suddenly drenched with blood. The firing stopped again. There were vague sounds in the dis-

tance, faint shouts, calls. Jackals howled.

The Legionnaires stirred in the semi-obscurity, silhouetted in the fog. Faces showed, lined and haggard. A canteen filled with ration rum was passed from hand to hand.

"Are we going to stick here all day?" a man asked loudly. "Why don't we move forward?"

"I'll have the general explain when we return," Kulhman said.

The light increased, the sun was rising. Metallic glints were kindled on the rifles, on the bayonets, sparkled on gold braid and brass buttons. Fenmayer awoke, stretched lingeringly, yawned. Then he was conscious of the situation, and his face grew hard.

"They're firing again!"

"Bah, they didn't make out so poorly," Sergeant Kulhman declared. "Sounds as if half of them were left."

The combat resumed on hillocks not very far inside the hostile zone. The companies were deployed, forming a long, tenuous skirmish line.

"Steady, steady," Barbaroux called.

He beckoned to Kulhman, spoke rapidly. The German returned, grinning cheerfully.

"I'm to take a couple of groups a little way into the hills, to try to help." He summoned Carroll. "Tell the American he needn't come. Wouldn't be right to risk himself for that guy out there."

"'You stay here,' he says," Carroll translated.

"What's the matter with me? I ain't got smallpox."

"Zerlich's up there,' Kulhman snapped.

"What about Zerlich?"

"Might as well tell you now," Carrol blurted out. "Zerlich is a cop. He told the captain last night. There are only two Americans here, and everybody knows he isn't after me."

Carroll expected an explosion of temper, oaths, a savage denunciation. But Dacorda surprised him anew. He scowled, as if the idea had difficulty seeping into his brain, then his face broke into a wide, cheerful smile.

"What do you know about that! It was him all the time, the son of a gun! Pop, I used to call him. Pop." He laughed. "Tell the squarehead it's okay, Jack, that I don't mind going.'"

"He's hardboiled," Carroll objected. "If he's alive, he'll pinch you."

"He can't collar me," Dacorda said, enjoying himself. "He don't dare! I know what he's after, and if he nabs me, he gets nothing. Listen, Jack, remember how he came after me when I fell over that cliff?"

"I remember he frisked you, sure."

"Never mind. I was as good as dead, without him. What do I care why he did it? How about it, Sergeant?"

"All right."

The sergeant went to obtain final instructions from Barbaroux.

CARROLL took a cartridge from his left pouch, slipped it into a breast-pocket. All Legionnaires fighting in Morocco save a cartridge for themselves. Without undue melodramatics, death is often better than capture in the hills. Carroll had never yielded to the superstition that the cartridge must be selected long in advance, and picked one at random when occasion called.

Dacorda saw the gesture, smiled.

"Mine's got a cross on it, so I can always tell it," he explained. He showed his "mercy cartridge." He had engraved a cross on it. The stocky man who had been known as Battling Melano smiled. "You never saw a cartridge like that, Jack. You think it's brass, but it's solid gold." He slipped the brass cylinder into a pocket, buttoned the flap securely. "Valuable!"

"Come on, come on!" Kulhman urged.

There were twenty men trotting behind him across the plain. They reached the slopes. The detonations were much nearer now. There was a halt, as Kulh-

man sought the position of the survivors. The automatic rifles opened up immediately. One raked right, the other left, of the Legionnaires' approximate location.

Although the sun was out, the mist still clung to bushes and grass like thin fleece. But they all knew that the sound of automatic firing would encourage their comrades to stick it out longer. Shorter flashes winked out from opposite slopes, bullets hummed, and the groups were under fire. The natives flung men to stem their advance.

"Fix bayonets. Forward!"

The groups made another long bound forward. Shadowy figures ran on the slopes to match their move. The hills were acrawl with riflemen, for the firing increased everywhere. A general engagement was starting. For four hundred yards, the Legionnaires raced, before opening fire anew.

Gianella was killed at the end of that run. The men of the old group were unlucky. Carroll removed the breechbolt from the dead man's Lebel, slipped it in his musette bag.

Kulhman stood, heedless of the shots aimed at him, trying to locate the men he sought. And a bewildered fellow, in bloody undershirt and khaki breeches, broke cover from nearby bushes. He fell headlong among the groups.

"Hello, Corland," Kulhman greeted simply. "Know where we can find the others?"

"Bunched up, maybe three hundred yards to the right and down this slope. I came over because I'm the best runner."

"Why the hell didn't they come with you? Waiting for us to call them taxis?"

"They've got to stick with the officer."

"D'Argoval's wounded?"

"He's dead, Sergeant. They hit him last night, in the first attack. He kept walking until he died. We thought maybe we could save his head, so we've been carrying him since four."

Carroll's mind accepted the statement without surprise. He had felt the same as those men did. Dead officers are beheaded by the natives if the corpses are left behind, and the heads become trophies. In a way, leaving the head of one's officer in the enemy's possession was dishonorable. It was the most natural thing for those hard pressed soldiers to carry that body most of the night, at the risk of their own lives.

"We'll bring them in," Kulhman stated.

With the private leading, there was no need to grope about. Kulhman tossed caution to the winds, and made a superb, headlong advance. The natives who clung to the dwindling detachment all night long were unwilling to let go. They withstood the blasts of the automatics, and the bayonet was called into play.

Point and butt, point and butt—the Legionnaires drove through the hillmen like a steel wedge into soft pine. Fenmayer rose after an encounter with his face laid open from eye to chin. Carroll's long reach stood him in good stead. It was difficult to slip under his extended rifle with a knife. Once, a native who was only half-dead, slashed at his legs as he hurdled over, and split the leather of his boot.

"There they are!"

The survivors of d'Argoval's expedition, six in number, were crouching among small boulders. The officer's corpse was a short distance behind them. They were so covered with blood and dirt that Carroll did not find Zerlich at once.

"You're all right now?"

"Sure. Got anything to drink? We've been at it all night."

Canteens were held out to them. Kulhman fired a smoke signal to indicate his position, organized its defense. It was up to the companies to rescue him now. It would have been madness to attempt a retreat through the swarming enemy.

"They jumped us about one-thirty. We fought all night," the rescued men repeated over and over. They seemed dazed, stunned to find themselves alive.

Then Carroll saw Zerlich. The detective was in bad shape. There was a gash under one eye, blood held his shirt glued to his skin. He started talking in a tense monotone as soon as Carroll hailed him.

"It's been going on all night, all night. They went crazy when the young officer was hit. I had to help carry him. He must weigh a ton. I was hit, too." He coughed with his hand against his mouth, showed it bloody. "Hit bad, in the lung."

"How you making out, Pop?" Dacorda asked, coming up.

"Lousy," Zerlich replied. His weary eyes sought Carroll, who read the mute question in them, and nodded. Yes, Dacorda had been told, Dacorda knew. "I'm sorry, Mike."

"That's all right," Dacorda said, patting the older man's shoulder reassuringly. "It's your racket, what the hell!"

Moroccan Spahis trotted by them, some firing from the saddle. Then long files of regular infantry followed. The firing reduced. A runner came to Kulhman, with instructions to remain where he was. The Legion units in action during the night would be allowed to rest before participating in the coming battle.

A military surgeon arrived, examined the wounded, applied first aid. He told Carroll that Zerlich was in no great danger.

"High and clean," he stated. "Six weeks in the hospital. Don't move him, the stretcher-bearers are on the way up."

"They'll get you back to camp," Carroll announced, "and from there you'll be flown in an ambulance plane to Meknes. What are you going to do? Get yourself out of the Legion or come back?"

"Go home. I've had enough!" Zerlich smiled weakly. "And my heart isn't in it anymore."

"What are you going to do about me, Pop?" Dacorda asked.

"Nothing, as long as they know you're here, anyway, and if they want you and can get you, there's nothing to stop them. No kidding, I hope they leave you alone."

Dacorda was nervous, as if ashamed of himself.

"See here, if it had to be anybody, I wish it was you. But I can't tell you. If you had got what you wanted so I couldn't help myself, I'd have been glad. Honest!"

"Mean that?" Carroll challenged.

"What do you think I am, a liar?"

Carroll thought the matter over. Dacorda had given an oath, which he had to keep. Reasoning coldly, his loyalty was doing no one any good. Barrister himself wanted the stuff found, to get clear. And Dacorda now said he wished he could settle the matter in some fashion.

"What's the matter with your jacket?" Carroll asked. "Here, I'll fix it." He rose, tipped the puzzled Dacorda's head back and jerked at his buttons. Then he sat down again. "Say, Zerlich, ever hear of the 'last cartridge,' the one you have for yourself?"

"Sure." Zerlich tried to shrug, winced with pain. "You'll find mine in my breast-pocket. Funny thing, when I thought I would need it, there it was, with my rifle back in camp and me with a pistol!"

Carroll found the cartridge.

"Dacorda wants to swap—sort of a souvenir. You take his, he gets yours."

"Say—" Dacorda broke off, as his hands felt his empty pocket.

"You haven't said a thing," Carroll reminded him.

He drew the bronze pellet with his teeth, shook the contents of the brass cylinder on his palm. With the particles of smokeless powder came a narrow

strip of notched metal, showing brighter surfaces at one end, where the guard had been filed off.

"How did you know?" Dacorda wondered.

"Solid gold, solid gold. You just as good as told me."

"Well, that was a swell place for it, anyway," Dacorda said. "If I had had to use that cartridge, they could have looked for that key a long while. And I've been carrying it all the way from Rochester."

Zerlich and Carroll exchanged glances. There was small need for secrecy now!

"Listen, I'll say I made a deal with you, Dacorda, and send you fellows a cut."

An hour later, Dacorda and Carroll escorted the stretcher as far as the plain. They shook hands, exchanged few words. Their lives were separating. They stared at each other, smiled. Then the stretcher-bearers started toward the camp. The two who remained behind walked back slowly.

"If he does what he said, we'll be in soft," Dacorda suggested. "You'll have some dough to start out with when you finish your enlistment. Maybe, I'll be a sergeant then, and with high pay and a private income. Oh, baby! Think he won't change his mind?"

"He won't change his mind," Carroll concluded. "You see, when a man has seen and done certain things out here, dollars don't look so important anymore."

Portrait of a killer—

THE LONESOMEST MAN

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

WHEN he first looked up and saw the man, a white man, Hatt was too startled to notice the pistols. The man had three of them, one in a holster under his left armpit, one in a larger holster at his right side, the third gripped in his right fist.

"What the hell're you doing here? Gimme something to eat, nigger!"

Hatt turned off the radio and sat back on his haunches, staring. He was too startled even to recognize the man, at first. To be sure, he never had seen him before, but he had seen his picture. Who hadn't? But now the man sagged with weariness; mud was splattered waist-high upon him; his face was blotched, rufous with mosquito bites, furiously swollen, and his hands and parts of his arms seen through the ripped shirt were an even darker red from the crowded small cuts.

The man walked to Hatt, wavered there, trying to keep his knees stiff. His chin, black with bristle, was thrust forward. He struck Hatt on a cheek with the barrel of the pistol, hard.

"Well, gimme something to eat! Don't sit there gawping!"

The black man rolled his eyes toward the swamp.

"You come out of there?"

"Sure I come out of there. Four days I been wading through that stuff. They was three of us, at first. But for three days now I ain't had a single soul to talk to. The other guys couldn't take it. Nobody else could take it but me, I guess. No man living!"

"I expect not."

"Three days without a damn soul around. I just wudged and wudged along. Don't keep sitting there like a fool! Get me something to eat!"

Hatt started to scrape a fish, but the man snatched it from him, took Hatt's sheath knife, backed to the other end of the clearing, sliced open the fish and ate it raw, spitting out small bones and fragments, growling like an animal.

"Got something to drink?"

Hatt handed him the canteen. The man tried to unscrew the cap, handed it back. He leveled the third pistol in position again.

"Undo it for me."

He took a deep gulp, and was about to take a second when he saw the flask.

"That liquor you got there?"

"I keeps it in case of snake bite."

"Yeah? Well, I'll have a slug of that instead. I guess I probably got bit a few times myself, if it comes to that. God knows I seen enough of 'em, coming through there! For three whole days snakes was pretty nearly the only living things I did see besides birds."

He walked around the clearing once, staggering a little. When he saw the shotgun. He seized it, threw out the two shells, pocketed them, glared suspiciously at Hatt.

"Who else lives here?"

"Nobody."

"You sure?"

"Yessuh."

The man hit him again with the pistol barrel.

"You give me any crap about that, nigger, and you know what you get, don't you?"

"No, suh. Ain't nobody else around here as far as I know."

The man looked around.

"I'm going to sleep."

Hatt said nothing. But when the man drew a pair of handcuffs from what remained of a hip pocket, Hatt's eyes grew very big.

"Don't like the look of these, huh? Think I'm a cop, huh?"

"No, suh. I didn't think that."

"No? Maybe you know who I am then, huh?"

"Yessuh. Least, I know who you *looks* like."

"Is that so? Well, who?"

"You sure *looks* a lot like Mist' Aubrey. You sure do."

"John Aubrey, huh?"

"Yessuh."

"Yeah. Well, as a matter of fact, that's who I am. John Aubrey. So now you know what I'm doing out in this God-forsaken dump. Pulled a job in Coral Gables, but they damn near caught up with us." He frowned. "Four whole days, and three days of it with nobody to talk to! I guess they figure I'm dead by this time."

"I expect they do. Yessuh. If you come through there."

"Damn well right I came through there! Came all the way from the Tamiami Trail. I guess they figure nobody could do that and keep alive, huh?"

Hatt nodded.

"And I guess nobody else could, either! And keep alive."

Aubrey handcuffed him to the root of a mangrove tree, and afterwards lurched to the center of the clearing, fell upon the poncho, pulled netting over himself, and instantly fell asleep.

Night came—in a hurry, as though it had been waiting for just this to happen.

Hatt sat there. It wasn't as bad as it might have been. The mangrove root arched out from the trunk a full eight feet above the ground, and it was possible to slide the cuff up and down. Mostly he squatted, but sometimes he stood for a while. His feet made little pools of water where they pressed into the soft black slime, and he shifted from place to place around the root. His right wrist was fastened to the root; he used his left to slap mosquitos. He had a tin of little cigars and he smoked some, but

mostly he just slapped. The swamp around him was utterly dark, and still.

IT wasn't until the end of the second day that John Aubrey demanded of Hatt the reason he lingered, boatless, in this remote corner of southwestern Florida. Until then Aubrey had not seemed curious. He searched Hatt and his camp, thoroughly. He kept the shotgun, the sheath knife and all three pistols jealously about his own person, and when he found the shotgun too heavy and awkward for continual handling he still kept the shells he had found in a box.

"You didn't walk here the way I did, nigger? You couldn't have!"

Hatt was cooking a fish. He shook his head.

"No, suh. I had a friend brought me."

"You're hiding out on something yourself."

"There was a man killed up near Naples, near where I live, Mist' Aubrey. White man, he was. Run a little store. They said a nigger kill him, an' they said it was me, an' some folk, they said they saw me run away afterwards. But I didn't have nothing to do with it, Mist' Aubrey! I wasn't 'round there at all when it happened! Only I couldn't prove that.

"He was mighty popular, the man that got killed. Folks all liked him, and they was mighty mad at me when they said I killed him. I was 'fraid they was going to grab me and lynch me. I was! An' they'd have done it, too, if I hadn't run away here."

"What'd yuh come here for, of all places?"

"I figured I know who did kill that white man, and I figured he was going to come back an' show his face after a while if he knew everybody thought I done it. When he come back—they prove it on him. There was a white man that was a good friend of mine, that I used to work for, an' he knows me mighty well, an' he was one that knew I was mighty likely to get lynched if somebody didn't take me away quiet. He know I didn't kill that man, because he know me an' he know I tell him the truth. So he got me away in his boat, an' he brought me here."

"So you came in a boat, huh? I knew you couldn't have come walking, the way I did."

"He know the shore all alone here, this man, an' he put me here where he can find me again, an' he give me these things to keep me all right. This radio set, he took it outa his boat, an' he let me keep it here for comp'ny."

"Yeah, but why'd you come here? Why not try to get out of the state—or somewheres else, anyway?"

"Get picked up, if I do that. This friend of mine, this white man, he can't take me very far because maybe they'd know. An' the policemen, they out picking up niggers that look like me everywhere. I got no money. What can I do? But out here nobody'll come get me."

"Hell no!" John Aubrey, who had robbed, it was said, eighty-two banks and was five times a murderer, gazed glumly about. "How long you been here, anyway?"

Hatt shrugged.

"Two weeks, three weeks."

"All alone?"

"Yessuh. My friend'll come an' get me when it's all right for me to go back to Naples again, when that other nigger come back an' they make him tell that he done it. Then he come and get me again."

John Aubrey swore; he looked nervously at the swamp in back of them. There was no dusk in this region, but the swamp, always dark, was preparing for another night. Birds were fussing themselves to sleep, and a wan mist writhed across the slime. He had spent almost four days in that swamp. Misshapen black mangroves, buttonwoods,

live oaks, but mostly mangroves, weighted by thousands of up-shoving parasites, crowded there in strained, agonized postures. The sun—they all sought the sun. In the shadows they could live but could not reproduce; so they sought the sunlight.

Red swamp lilies, spotted yellow at the base, spleenwort with long strap-like leaves emphatically serrated for the better catching of whatsoever would help them to raise themselves, even such unexpected flowers as begonias and rhododendrons had gone mad in the soundless cruel struggle of the swampland and were unblushingly epiphytic, climbing, climbing.

Only the Spanish moss hung down, in lugubrious dead-gray hanks. It alone had no wish for sunlight.

"Three days I didn't see a single blasted soul to talk to. Did you really bump that guy, nigger? You don't have to worry about telling me."

"No, suh. I didn't kill him."

After the first night the handcuffs were not used. Aubrey left them fastened to the root, and seemed to have no objection to sharing the poncho and mosquito netting. He still kept all the weapons on him.

Once he asked, "You really think this friend of yours will come back and get you?"

"Yessuh, he'll come for me. He said he would. Soon's it's safe."

"What'll I do then?"

"He'll take you, Mist' Aubrey. You come back with me."

And John Aubrey laughed at that. The dumb nigger didn't know how many men were searching and ready to shoot him at sight. He'd committed eighty-two bank robberies. That's what the papers said. He didn't know, himself. He had broken two state prisons. He'd killed five men.

"This place ain't so bad, once you get used to it. Though I wish you didn't have to go so far back into those trees to get decent water." He rose, and with consternation asked, "Where're you going now?"

"Catch some fish."

"I'll go with you," said John Aubrey.

Hatt's friend, in leaving the radio set had left a luxury, but the fishing equipment was an essential. Their principal article of diet was fish. Hatt had two large boxes of oyster crackers and a few tins of corn, besides the flask of whiskey. Sometimes he poked back into the swamp and found a cabbage palm, and then they had cold slaw. But Aubrey discouraged these expeditions; he didn't like to be left alone. So mostly they ate fish.

Hatt caught them. Aubrey sat and watched, and talked. To Aubrey fish were just food, and he was puzzled by Hatt's enthusiasm.

"Ain't that pretty, Mist' Aubrey? Look at that one! Ain't that the prettiest thing you ever saw?"

He caught, in addition to the more ordinary, familiar fishes, many bright tropical ones. The water was brackish hereabouts, for they were near the Gulf of Mexico. When the tide was in the stream fairly swarmed with aquatic curiosities, angel fish, squirrel fish, Spanish mackerel, toros, blue tangs, rock beauties—magnificently marked, green, fawn, lemon yellow, black, with vertical purple bars, mottled in vivid orange, silver bellied, longitudinally stripped in blue and white and shrieking scarlet, with mouth and anal and dorsal fins of one color while the body was another.

Hatt always threw these back. John Aubrey declared that he wouldn't eat such funny-looking things anyway, and Hatt thought it would be a shame. But Hatt liked to look at them, to turn them in the sunlight, exclaiming at their colors.

"Sometimes I think you're nuts, nigger," Aubrey told him. He never asked Hatt his name. "Let's get back. I'm hungry."

Hatt did all the work. John Aubrey would follow him with his gaze—not from fear, for he had decided that Hatt for all his bulk was harmless—but because he liked to see another human being. He didn't like to find himself contemplating that swamp. Hatt often looked there. It fascinated him. He would sit on his haunches in the middle of the clearing, sometimes even while he was cooking a fish, and stare without expression at the tangle of steamed, suffering foliage.

"For God's sake stop gawping at those trees! What the hell d'you like to keep looking at them for?"

"They're pretty. Don't you think they're pretty, Mist' Aubrey? Them white flowers 'way up there—"

The white flowers were orchids.

"Pretty! You got funny ideas, nigger. Listen—I spent most of four days tramping through that place, and before I got there I was wading along through the Everglades back of there, and I seen all I want to see of them white flowers!"

Aubrey talked much of the time, though sometimes he would get angry and call Hatt a dirty nigger and tell him to keep his dirty mouth shut. Then Hatt would sit smoking little cigars and gazing into the swamp, and Aubrey would fiddle with the radio.

Aubrey had no favorite programs. He didn't really listen; he just heard. The sound of it seemed to reassure him, and it made little difference whether that sound was music or talk.

"It was this damn radio that tipped me off you were here in the first place," Aubrey said. "I'd been three days without seeing a single solitary person, and I was just about ready to flop down and give the alligators a treat, when I heard Amos and Andy. I thought I'd gone bughouse and was hearing things—you know, like the guys see things on the desert, that ain't there."

"I don't like Amos and Andy so much any more," Hatt said. "What I like is to get some music. Nice music."

"I don't give a damn what you like," said Aubrey. "I'm the one that's playing this thing."

THEY had been in the place about a month, and they were out on the mud flats from which Hatt used to fish and where occasionally at low tide he caught fiddler crabs, when they heard the boom of a shotgun. It wasn't far away.

John Aubrey had been goodnatured that day, until this happened. When he heard the shot he stiffened, and his eyes hardened. Two of the pistols, Hatt gathered, belonged to the members of the Aubrey gang who had attempted to escape with their leader and had not been able to take it. John Aubrey seldom mentioned those men.

"You hear what I just heard, nigger?"

"Yessuh. I expect that's my friend coming back for me."

"Yeah? Well, maybe it's somebody coming for *me!* You can't tell. Let's get back to where we belong."

A little later they heard a "Hull-*o*!" It was quite near, nearer than the sound of the shotgun had been.

"That's sure Mist' Otway! He coming back for me like he said he would! He said he'd yell like that, for me to hear him!"

"Shut up."

It was unbelievable that any man could know the maze back of this coast so well that he could return after six or seven weeks to a designated spot. It is a mass of tiny islands. Some of the streams lead nowhere, some lead back upon themselves and some extend through dim corridors to the flat, unroofed Everglades. There is no rock, no ground more than a foot above water level. The swamps give no clue, offer no landmark.

It came again. "Hull-*O*!" Very close now.

John Aubrey drew a pistol with his right hand. He didn't aim it at anything in particular—just held it there.

"We're going to wait right here and let them go past."

Hatt cried, "That's my friend! I can tell his voice!"

"Didn't you hear me? I said we're going to let them go past. If we have to we'll get back out of sight, though I ain't anxious to go back there. But don't let me hear a single yap out of you, see?"

Hatt spun about, raced away from the shore, across the clearing toward the shelter of the swamp. John Aubrey turned. "Hey!" he yelled "Stop!"

Hatt didn't stop. He ran fast, crouching, zig-zagging a little. John Aubrey fired twice at him, and then he was out of sight.

"Hull-*O*! Coming!"

John Aubrey had lost his nerve, and he knew it, bitterly realized it. He was afraid to go into the swampland alone. He went in a slight distance, but he raced out again to the clearing. He thought he heard the nigger tearing through the creepers to the left, but he wasn't sure. The nigger could encircle this place, hail his friends a little further down the bank—

A small boat came suddenly into sight, not eighteen feet away, Hatt's friend, Otway, was in the stern, poling. A deputy sheriff stood in the bow.

John Aubrey started to yell.

"You ain't going to take him away from me, you lousy bastards! You can't take him away! I won't let you!"

He was waving the pistol. Probably he had no thought of shooting, and certainly he was aiming at neither man. But there can be small blame for taking no chances with a man like Aubrey. Both recognized him. The deputy jerked out a revolver and fired four times.

John Aubrey's arms fell to his sides, and he staggered back as though somebody had pushed him in the chest. He started to yell again, tried to raise his arms. Then Otway, who had grabbed a shotgun, fired full at the man's belly. And Aubrey went down, his flesh shredded now like his clothing; in a moment he was all blood in front.

Hatt said, when he helped them to get the body into the boat: "I don't think that man meant you no hurt. He just lost his head, that's all."

"We was thinking of stopping to ask him to that effect," the deputy said, "but we reckoned maybe we better hadn't, see?"

"I don't think he meant you no hurt. He was just lonesome, that man. I never knew a man that was so lonesome. He was the lonesomest man I ever knew."

Justice in the "high air"—

TUNNEL LAW

By BORDEN CHASE

A HEAVY blanket of fog swirled in lazy circles along the tunnel floor. It lifted, broke into lacey fingers of white mist that clustered about the blazing lights, and drifted slowly into the distant vagueness of the tube. Dim figures weaved and swayed, and bright flashes of shining steel cut through the haze as the sand hogs toiled in the heading.

The dull reek of river ooze was heavy in the air. It rose with rank insistence above the damp muck piling from the lower shield pockets. It stung the nostrils with an acrid bite, smelling of age-old slime and decay. It told of a time when the earth was young, when instinct ruled and reason had not been born.

Gunga Sam knew the river bed. He knew many things. He knew that men will work when fear drives, that hate is a lash and that pride swings it with heavy strokes. Gunga Sam was old in the world beneath the river. He knew its laws.

On a stout wooden platform that bridged the center line of the heading, he drove his iron gang mercilessly. His long arms dangled with a pendulum-like motion as he stepped slowly about beneath the curved roof of the tunnel. Glistening streams of sweat twisted amongst the corded muscles of his naked back. His wide, sloping shoulders swayed ponderously with each motion of his

body. Beneath the misty glare of the lights he appeared a giant, wobbling ape—carved from ebony.

A vague doubt clouded the rugged features of Big Tim Martin. The heading boss watched his "second in command" closely. Something was happening up there on the platform. Something that concerned only the blacks. It wasn't for him to know—not yet. In time, Gunga Sam would tell him. At least, as much as was good for a white man to hear. Big Tim waited. Waited as he had once before while the giant black strained at a massive timber that held Tim trapped in a flooding tunnel. It was then Big Tim had named him Gunga. Tim always said Kipling knew men.

The work in the heading was progressing as usual. The giant negroes of the iron gang swung to the monotonous labor. They worked in pairs on the long-handled ratchet wrenches, tightening bolts that drew together the tunnel segments. Terrific pressure was necessary to form a watertight joint between the plates. And it came from the writhing muscles beneath those shining hides.

"Heavy on the wrenches!" cried Gunga Sam. "Bend yo' backs and get de ring tight. Don't lose time watchin' Yaller and Frenchy. I tells you when."

"Yaller and Frenchy. So that was it," thought Big Tim. He watched the monstrous negroes, one a Senegalese, the other a Jamaican. And he realized that a fight was being waged in the heading. A strange fight, not of flying fists, but a conquest for supremacy on a wrench. Black man's business.

He climbed to the platform. He studied them as they swayed up and down above the long wrench, swinging the handle in powerful strokes. Yaller was new in the gang; this was his first shift. But the man's reputation as a trouble-maker was common knowledge amongst the sandhogs. He was a braggart and a boaster, cruel in his triumphs and his tongue was bitter. The men hated him. But his skill with an iron-wrench was known wherever tunnels were built.

And now Gunga Sam had matched Yaller against Frenchy. "Strange," thought Big Tim. The iron gang was Gunga's pride, each member one of his "chil'ren," and they followed him from job to job, faithfully. There was not another gang like them in the game. And they were proud of their might. They had lost a man that week, killed by compressed air. That left an opening for a new man. Big Tim had been standing near the tunnel shaft when Yaller, a powerful Jamaican, arrived and dared Gunga Sam to put him to work. It was a challenge Big Tim understood. He said nothing; it was for his iron boss to decide. But bewilderment gripped him when Gunga teamed Yaller with Frenchy. For Frenchy was the "fav'rit child."

It was two years now, since the day Frenchy saw his first tunnel. A bashful, grinning giant from the forests of Senegal, he came to Big Tim and in his stilted English asked for work. Martin turned him over to Gunga Sam and the iron boss had taken him into his "fam'ly." He taught him of the strength hidden in those muscular black arms, and made him wise in the way of the tunnels. He watched over him, grunting with pleasure as Frenchy surpassed the other "chil'ren." And as a result, the Senegalese had but one god—and the name of that diety was Gunga Sam.

"Come on, you apes!" roared the iron boss. "Tie up de ring. De're on de last plate now."

THE wrenches hummed as the sweating negroes rushed the completion of their work. Big Tim grinned as he watched the sudden burst of speed. The heading boss looked steadily at his foreman and a flash of understanding passed between

white man and black. Then Gunga weaved about the platform, critically examining each bolt. When they met with his approval, he nodded his head in token the men might cease. One team after another finished, and at length a grinning ring of iron men gathered about Frenchy and Yaller in the center of the platform.

The Senegalese and the Jamaican swung in crashing rhythm beneath the watchful eyes of the gang. Their powerful arms lifted the handle of the seventy-five pound wrench to the level of their eyes. *Wheeep!* A gasping breath broke from their throats with the downward sweep. Up came the wrench, two pairs of long black arms flexing at the elbows. *Wheeep!* The arms straightened, speeding the handle toward the platform. Each downward stroke twisted the socket a quarter turn, driving the nut ever tighter on the bolt, jamming it hard against the metal washer.

"Whip it, dere boys! Whip it!" cried Gunga. He stepped forward, catching the handle to break the rhythm. He snapped it down—up again—down. Short, choppy strokes that hissed through the air. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* The tempo changed. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* A rapid, staccato beat. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* They whipped the handle with rapid, double jerks. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* The wrench flashed down, the nut chugged in the socket.

Frenchy set the pace, throwing the weight of his wide-spreading shoulders against the handle. Big Tim smiled as he saw Yaller's lips draw into a snarl. The heading boss stepped beside Gunga Sam.

"He'll make no more trouble," he said.

"Dat devil's met his match at last," grunted the iron boss.

"I hope so," murmured Big Tim.

Well he knew the man who faced the Senegalese across the wrench. Yaller's reputation was evil. Had it not been for his strength and his skill, no boss would have tolerated him.

It was an honor to be paired with Yaller—an honor and a menace. No man had been able to maintain the terrific pace set by this champion of the wrench. One after another he had worn down his partners, worked them off their feet, burned them out. It was said that no iron man had ever worked in the high air again after one job with Yaller.

The killing speed tore their muscles, twisted the tendons and inflamed them. The dreaded nitrogen bubbles, product of the compressed air, lodged in the distorted joints and hours later the unfortunate victim writhed in agony as the bends wracked his limbs with torment.

Yaller seemed to take a savage delight in the growing number of men destroyed by his prowess. He taunted each new partner with stories of their predecessor's fate. He dwelt on the fierce stabbing pains that came with the bends; the withering, twisting torture of paralysis; and the horrid strangling death that followed an attack of the "chokes."

In Frenchy he had met his match. Under the fatherly guidance of the iron boss, this "fav'rit child" had become a master of the wrench, a champion in his own right. Yes, the fame of the giant Senegalese was equal to that of Yaller. But it was a kindlier fame. No list of broken men was charged against him. It is true, he set the pace. But the strength that poured from his flailing arms eased the labor of his partners. He worked with them, Yaller against them.

Less than an hour before, when Gunga Sam teamed him with Yaller, Frenchy offered co-operation. Yaller, mistaking good nature for weakness, taunted the huge Senegalese. Frenchy grinned, threw his bulk against the wrench, and the murderous race was on.

The scorching blast of compressed air that roared from the feed line wrung the moisture from their naked, straining backs. The thirty-eight pounds of pres-

sure in the heading kept their hearts beating a rapid tattoo beneath their heaving chests. Their breath came in laboring gasps as the heavy wrench rose and fell in flashing strokes.

"Dat boy of mine gonna wear him down," grinned Gunga Sam.

Big Tim was silent.

"Like—hell!" The words jerked from Yaller's twisted lips, each sound following a downward thrust of the wrench. "Frenchy—can't—beat—me—. No—man—can."

"Maybe," said Gunga. "Maybe."

The other negroes of the iron-gang silently watched the battle of the giants. It was close to quitting time and Big Tim glanced at his watch. A scant five minutes remained. The short one-hour shift would soon be over and Yaller and Frenchy were straining every effort to increase the tempo of the stroke.

Frenchy's eyes seemed to bulge from his head, his nostrils flared and wisps of froth flecked his mouth. Yet despite his exertions, his heavy lips curved in a grin of good nature that goaded his partner to desperation.

"Hy, dere," cried Gunga. "Dat's a good bolt. Get off it. Hook onto de nex' one and break yo' backs."

Frenchy slid one huge paw along the handle, lifted the ratchet from the nut and quickly fitted it over the next in the ring. Once more the wrench rose and fell, churning the air in its swoop. *Wheeep!* The heavy handle spun in an arc. *Click-click-click!* The spokes of the ratchet chattered with the up-stroke. *Wheeep!* Down it came again, grinding the nut home.

Splashing drops of red lead fell from the bolts as the pressure of the washer squeezed the waterproofing from the hemp grummets. It streaked the shining hides of the laboring negroes in long splashes of scarlet. Through the haze of the clouded tunnel they appeared as war-daubed savages, leaping and bending in some pagan dance. The moisture streamed from their bodies in the withering heat of the compressed air. It mingled with the crimson markings, causing them to glow like darting tongues of flame.

The men of the iron gang crowded close about. The stench of the river ooze wafted upward from the bottom. It was old—old—centuries old. Slowly the veneer of civilization cracked and peeled before the mad conflict. The dull roar of the air beat against their ears, sounding the muffled throb of the tom-tom. They moved, swayed. Slowly at first. Then faster. And they howled, beating their hands in cadence with the crash of the wrench.

Big Tim thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He crossed to the edge of the platform. He was a white man.

The wrench flashed. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* The cry became a chant. One after another the negroes caught the rhythm and joined the wild chorus. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* It echoed along the arched tunnel roof, mingling with the dull clatter of the muck cars. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* It rose, higher, faster, maddening in its throbbing beat. *Wheeep! Wheeep!* Barbaric, wild, savage pulsations of sound that whirled the fighters into frenzy. The spell of the jungle crept into the tunnel. The misty heading faded before the gleaming eyes of the iron men. In its place there came the vision of a steaming swamp where tall trees grew and the measured thump of the tom-tom muttered through the waving marsh grass.

The sound was ominous. It rose above the crash of stamping boots, boots that moved in a slow circle as the swaying negroes surrendered to the weird chant. It drove the fighters to a faster pitch, lashing them with its mad insistence. *Wheep! Wheep!——Wheep! Wheep!*

Blood-flecked splotches of foam crept from the corners of Yaller's mouth. They dripped onto his straining chest and mingled with the pouring sweat. The walls of the tunnel swam dizzily about

him. His eyes glazed. The lights waved and spun in dancing circles. The writhing muscles of his long ape-like arms twitched. His hands slipped from the wrench. He backed across the platform. Slowly his knees buckled. He swayed, staggered a few jerking steps and crashed headlong.

The spell was broken. Big Tim climbed to the bottom and stood silently beside the muck pile. The muckers were bending to their work. In the shield pockets, the miners were busily breasting down. The tunnel was driving. He shook his head. It might have been a dream.

But above him, wild hysterical yells proclaimed it reality. The iron men leaped madly, pounding each other in savage joy. In their midst stood Gunga Sam. Had the new champion been truly his son, the pride of the iron boss could not have been greater. Frenchy leaned dully against the handle of his wrench. His breath came in long sobbing gasps. He looked to Gunga Sam for a smile of approval, and received it as a blessing. His head drooped wearily and he lurched across the platform to the curved wall. He climbed with unsteady steps down the flanges and opened the tap of the water spout. Leaning over, he drenched his face beneath the cooling flow.

ABOVE, Yaller lay with his head hanging over the edge of the platform. A mad light flashed in his eyes as the full import of his defeat seeped into his sluggish brain. No longer the champion, the victims of his savagery would gather at the tunnel shaft to taunt him. He would be an object of scorn and derision. He snarled, and it was the snarl of an enraged beast.

He drew his shaking knees beneath him. His shoulders heaved. Slowly his head turned and a pair of cunning eyes watched the gang. The iron men were crowded about Gunga Sam, laughing, shouting congratulating him upon his wisdom in matching Frenchy with the hated Yaller. No one wasted a glance upon the fallen giant. And stealthily his hand closed upon the handle of an iron-wrench. He drew it quietly across the platform. The blunt end, weighted with the heavy ratchet, rose slowly into the air. It swooped, spinning past the edge of the platform and fell with murderous impact upon the head of Frenchy.

The Senegalese dropped like a felled ox.

"Hy dere, Frenchy, where are you, boy?" cried Gunga Sam.

He strode across the platform in search of the new champion. One swift glance told him of the tragedy. The muscles of his jaws knotted as he turned to look at Yaller.

"I didn't go for to do it," cried Yaller. "It—it slipped. Honest, Gunga, it slipped."

The iron men crowded to the edge, incredulous, stunned. Two climbed to the tunnel floor and lifted Frenchy's head. Silently they gathered him in their arms and laid him on a nearby flat-car. The muckers, electrified, stared but made no comment. This was the iron gang's business. Big Tim sprang up the flanges as the iron boss turned toward Yaller.

"You murdered him!" With heavy deliberation. The accusation came from Gunga Sam. His mighty arms lifted. "You die, Yaller!"

"Steady, oldtimer," said Big Tim as he stepped between them. "Steady does it."

"It weren' no fault of mine," said Yaller. "I jes' went for to pick up de wrench and——"

"Shut yo' mouth!" roared Gunga Sam. "I didn' see it happen but I might jes' as well. You killed Frenchy. You killed my child."

His hands were clenched. They opened and the fingers twitched. His shoulders weaved from side to side. He looked long at Big Tim. The heading

boss held his gaze. There was understanding between them.

"De law!" said Gunga Sam and Big Tim stepped aside.

Yaller trembled. It was not the law of courts and magistrates of which Gunga Sam spoke. From this Yaller was safe. The tunnel keeps its secrets. But there was another law—the law of the tunnel. And this law was implacable. It called for a life in payment of a life.

A hushed silence greeted Gunga Sam's decision. The men of the iron gang knew the meaning of these words. The tunnel was deep and thirty-eight pounds of air were holding the river in check. When the gang quit work and entered the man-lock, they stayed there for thirty-eight minutes. One minute of decompression for each pound of air was the inflexible rule of the tunnel. It was in this lock, shut off from the world by tons of pressure, that Yaller was to go on trial for his life. Should the verdict of the iron gang go against him, the wrath of Gunga Sam would be unleashed. They would fight. It was legend that Gunga Sam had killed a man with a single blow.

Few words were spoken when the relieving gang appeared in the heading. Accidents were common in the tunnel, and death never came as a shock. Frenchy was well liked, but he was gone. Some of the sand hogs reached down and gently patted his shoulder, then turned to their labors. Big Tim led his miners and muckers up-tunnel. The iron gang plodded after them. And it was a solemn procession. Two men pushed the flat-car on which the body of the giant Senegalese lay covered with bags. Close behind followed Yaller. He stumbled along, drawing the folds of his jacket closely about his shoulders. His eyes rolled from one to another of the men in the gang. Beside him walked Gunga Sam.

They reached the ponderous concrete bulkhead that marked the limit of the tunnel. The door of the muck-lock stood open and the car, carrying its mute burden was pushed into the long metal cylinder. No need now for decompression. The muckers and miners filed silently into the adjoining man-lock. Big Tim paused beside the door. The iron men formed a solemn group as they ringed the entrance to the muck-lock. Gunga Sam lifted one powerful arm and commanded attention.

"Bow yo' heads, chil'ren," he said softly.

The iron gang obeyed. Their eyes closed and their muscular bodies swayed to the surge of a mighty emotion.

From the distant reaches of the tunnel came the muted roar of the air pouring from the feed line. It echoed along the curved roof of the tube—a sustained note played upon a mighty organ beneath the iron arches of an underground cathedral. The lights were dim, flickering points of fire that winked as candle flames through the drifting haze. The voice of Gunga Sam sounded a rumbling chant.

Big Tim Martin gripped the man-lock door with iron fingers. Strange men, these blacks. Could a white man ever know their minds? They were praying for Frenchy, solemnly and devoutly. In a few moments they would sit as jury to decide the fate of Yaller. Big Tim had no doubt as to the verdict. Yaller stood convicted even now. And Gunga Sam's ponderous fists would exact full measure of justice. Tunnel justice.

The jaws of the heading boss snapped. This thing could not be! It must not! He lifted his head, spoke——

The grim fates intervened.

Gunga Sam had crossed to the signal switch beside the muck-lock. Once—twice—three times he closed the circuit of the switch. He set his shoulders to the massive iron door and heaved. A muffled boom trembled along the tube as the door swung closed. The men of

the iron gang opened their eyes and stared about.

"Where is he?" cried one.

Yaller was gone.

His crumpled jacket lay close to the muck-lock door on the tunnel floor. An iron man pointed an accusing finger, first to the jacket, then to Gunga Sam.

"He's in de lock," he said. "You let him sneak off."

"Open that door!" cried another.

Gunga Sam stood quietly, his wide spread shoulders against the mighty portal, listening. At last it came, the muffled howl of the air pouring from the lock. He stepped forward. Tons of pressure sealed the chamber. Yaller was gone.

The iron gang muttered, but a roar from Gunga Sam silenced them. He strode to the entrance of the man-lock and faced Big Tim. Again the gaze of the two men locked.

Big Tim strove for understanding. But it would not come. The tunnel law was implacable, a life for a life. But Gunga Sam had let Yaller escape. Why?

Outside, at the foot of the shaft, a lock tender saw the flashing light above the muck-lock. He seized the handle of a valve and swung it. A howling blast of air burst from the exhaust line. It filled the shaft with a thunderous roar, echoing dimly in the street above. Quickly it sank to a low moan, ceased, died. The door groaned with the releasing pressure. The lock tender caught the handle and pulled it open.

A billowing cloud of fog rolled from the lock. The white mist of rapid decompression swirled about the bottom of the shaft. Through it, as a gaunt specter wreathed in steam, came the crouching figure of Yaller.

"My God!" cried the lock tender. "Are you crazy?"

Yaller did not answer. A clinging mantle of vapor drifted like a pall about his shoulders. His eyes were deep in their sockets. His cheeks were drawn, vapid, hollow. He moved silently from the lock and stepped onto the waiting cage. The benumbed lock tender gave the signal and it shot upward. When the car reached the gantry above the street level, Yaller paused in uncertainty.

He was an outcast—a fugitive from the tunnel and the men of his gang. The frightful shock of instantaneous decompression was still upon him. He gazed dully about, then stumbled off in the direction of the waterfront. He skulked beneath the dark shadows of the silent warehouses. His head weaved from side to side as his eyes sought a protective shelter, a hole to crawl into. Onward, following the slight incline that led to the river, the shaking negro made his way.

A chill breeze swept down from the north, riding the turbulent surface of the stream. Heavy clouds spread a dull cloak across the winter sky. Yaller trembled. His cowering shoulders were naked and the sweat drenched trousers clung in folds to his legs. He moaned, drooped his head and lurched with sagging knees along the narrow street that edged the river.

THIRTY-EIGHT minutes had passed when Big Tim led the gang from the lock. They crowded onto the cages and were lifted to the gantry. The miners and muckers hurried to the protective shelter of the dressing rooms, their coats drawn closely about their shoulders. The iron gang loitered, but a sharp command from Gunga Sam sent them on their way. He walked to the edge of the gantry and gazed toward the river.

Big Tim crossed to the company field office, a two-story red brick building that flanked the structure above the tunnel shaft. He stood before a tall desk upon which rested a ledger. It was here each heading boss reported the activities of his shift. Big Tim's pencil traveled swiftly as it scribbled a record of the tunnel's progress. It slowed to a scrawl:

Lost one man. Frenchy killed by falling wrench.

The ledger did not balance.

He left the office and rejoined Gunga Sam at the top of the gantry steps.

"What now, Gunga?" he asked.

"We wait," said the iron boss. "He'll be back."

Horrid realization gripped Big Tim. He looked toward the river.

"Think he went that way?"

"Most like. Dere's ships at de docks. He'd want to get away. But he'll be back."

The silence was long. Big Tim turned the collar of his sheepskin coat closely about his throat. Night was coming. And it was cold. A chill wind whipped through the street that led to the river. It gathered the dust of the deserted road into dancing spirals that twisted and lurched like drunken ghosts. Quickly they dissolved. Then formed again. And slithered along the walls of the silent warehouses, vanishing in the lengthening shadows. One was more distinct. It spun madly up from the waterfront. It lurched against a factory wall, careened off and whirled into the roadway.

Big Tim gripped the arm of his iron boss. He pointed. But Gunga Sam had seen. His eyes were fastened to the gyrating figure. He started down the stairs, shoulders swaying ponderously.

"He's comin' back," he said. "It got 'im. It might have been de bends, might have been de staggers, but he deserved de chokes. And it got 'im."

"Great God!" cried Big Tim. "The chokes!"

He dashed into the roadway. His long legs carried him in leaping strides toward the stricken negro. There was but one relief for the chokes. Yaller must get to the tunnel and re-enter the pressure. Air, and air alone could release the smothering nitrogen bubbles that clogged the tissues of his lungs. They had formed in thirty-eight pounds of pressure and the sudden decompression in the muck-lock had held them intact.

"Yaller!" roared Big Tim. "This way —this way, Yaller!"

But Yaller turned. A madness had seized him. As the heading boss approached, the crazed Jamaican lunged forward, leaping, racing toward the river with frantic speed. His hands clutched at his throat, tearing the flesh. His breath caught, came in choking gasps, whistled through clenched teeth.

Suddenly Yaller stopped. The heading boss closed in. The iron man doubled, twisted to one side and headed back to the gantry. Big Tim lengthened his stride. At the foot of the gantry steps Gunga Sam stood with statue-like stolidity. Yaller saw him. He tripped, twisting as he fell and crashed headlong into the gutter.

"De lock—*de lock. . .*"

The words broke off in a gasping sob. His head thrust back. A swollen tongue crowded from his mouth and the heavy lips flattened against his teeth. He lurched forward. His chest heaved spasmodically. Frantically he beat on it. His hands clenched—loosened. The fingers interlocked—twisted. A claw-like thumb hooked the corner of his mouth, pulling at it. Tearing. He slipped to the ground. His arms reached out. One hand gripped the toe of a heavy boot.

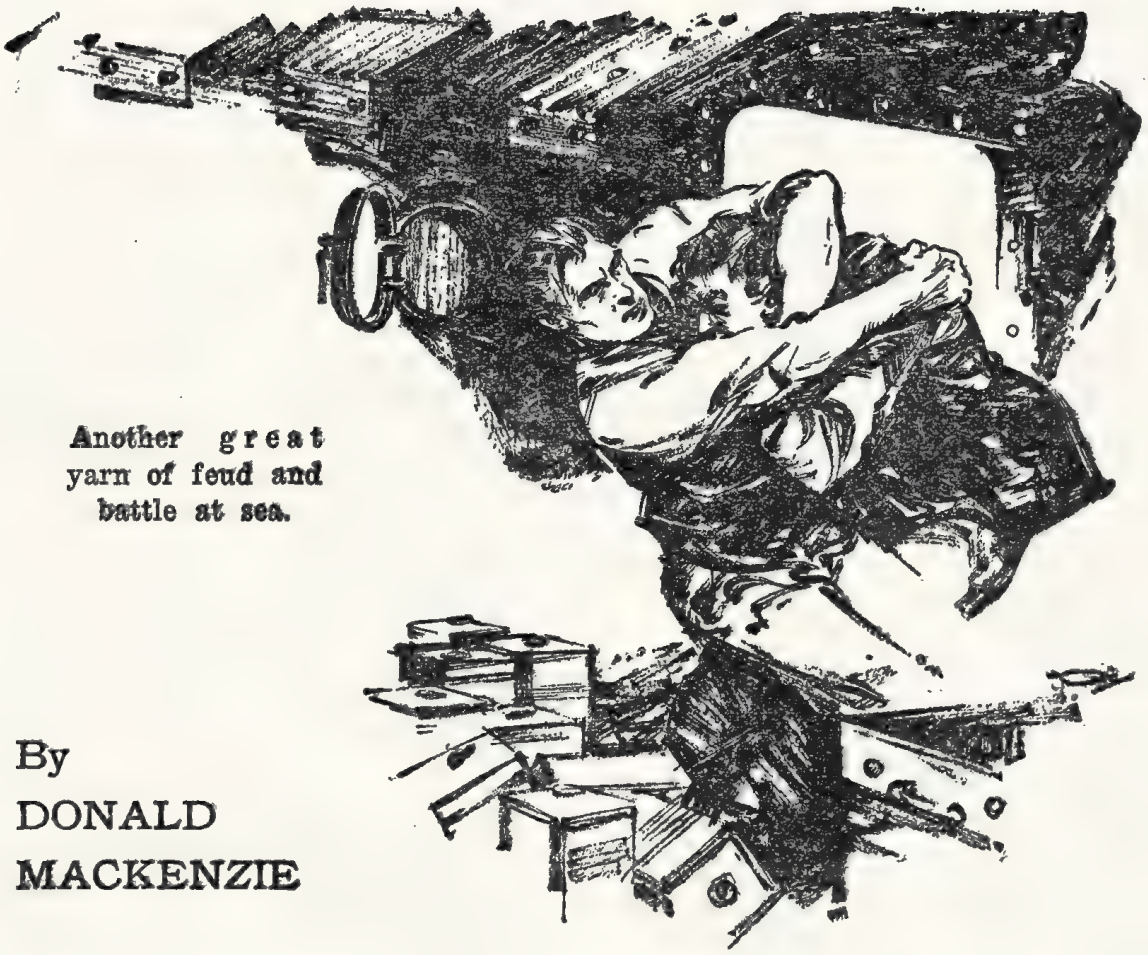
A spiral of dust whirled up from the river. It twisted its way to the gantry steps. It spun slowly to the feet of Gunga Sam. It dissolved.

It was no more.

Big Tim stood before the ledger. His pencil drew a broad line through the last notation. Beneath it he wrote:

Lost two men. Frenchy killed by falling wrench. Yaller died from the chokes.

The ledger balanced. It was the law of the tunnel.



Another great yarn of feud and battle at sea.

By DONALD MACKENZIE

KLINE OF THE CARDOGAN

UNDER a cloud of grey metallic dust the five thousand ton ocean tramp *Cardogan* clanged and rattled taking ore, and olive oil in cans, at Salonika. She lay careened against the dock beneath a blistering July sun that brooded in the glittering dust cloud and glared suffocatingly from the white work of her deckhouse. All day the carriers sweated and yelped in the dusty inferno of the quay, and the sun raised silent bubbles in the deck paint high above their heads.

Just before dusk a brisk and husky young man shouldered his way past the toiling bearers and swung aboard. Trotting up the bridge ladder he swept the soiled and rusty decks with a practiced eye.

"Blowsy old harlot," he muttered amiably, sniffing the faint sea-tang that for a bare instant penetrated the dust. Then he rapped sharply on a door marked "Captain."

A voice shouted a harsh, "Come in."

Behind the door a heavy-set man chewed a cigar stump and regarded his visitor under eyebrows that were wide sooty smudges on his broad face.

"Captain Drake?" The man touched a sandy forelock deferentially and returned Drake's hard stare with a gaze that was steady and calm.

"I'm Kline, the new second mate," he announced.

"Come in, Kline. Shut the door." Drake bit his words off gruffly. "I hear you've been sick in the hospital."

"Yes, sir," Kline smiled a wry smile. "I picked up a fever leaving Odessa and laid up here six weeks. I'm stout enough now."

"Hmph. You were second in the *Williwaw* weren't you. I know Captain Roscoe. Old shipmate."

"A fine man, sir, and a shipmaster."

"I suppose he is."

"I looked in on the man you sent to the hospital," Kline volunteered after a pause.

"Lambson?" Drake's eyes fell to the ash of his cigar. "You're taking his place," he said nervously. "He fell into the square of Number Two hatch."

"That's what the consul told me," the younger man said thoughtfully.

"Good man Lambson, I don't understand it." Drake's voice was sympathetic. "He walked right off the 'tween deck. I'm afraid it finished him."

"Accidents happen—" Kline began.

"Damn careless in a ship's officer," Drake exploded peevishly. "Mr. Mullen found him on the tank tops."

"Mr. Mullen," Kline said in a small voice. It was neither a question or a statement, but a bit of each.

Drake's watery eyes flicked a quick glance at Kline. The cigar stump rolled to one side of his mouth and stuck there.

"Chief officer," he rumbled. "We sail soon as he gets aboard. D'you know him?"

"Mullen is not an uncommon name, sir," Kline said guardedly.

"I suppose not. Well, go below, Kline. You'll find Johnson there somewhere. He's the third." Drake pushed out a thick hand. "Good luck!"

On deck the easy grin on Kline's face faded. His square chin lowered a little and jutted forward. His normally wide open blue eyes narrowed and his searching glance swept the cluttered Cardogan fore and aft.

"Fell in the square of Number Two, did he? Mr. Mullen found him on the tank tops, did he?" He bore down bitterly on the name of Mullen. "Huh!" Skepticism and contempt were blended in his last word. Silently he flung his sea-bag across a broad shoulder and tramped sturdily to the main deck.

Before leaving the hospital Kline had visited Lambson. He had found the man something less than conscious and held together with splints and bandages. Close examination had caused Kline's eyes to widen and a soft whistle to escape his lips. Somebody had "worked up" Lambson—had beaten him dizzy.

With a grunt of disdain Kline dumped his scant duffle on the bunk in his room and grimly set to work sorting it out. After a minute or two a lagging step in the alleyway outside drew his attention and he dropped the stuff to face around as the door opened.

Sagging slightly against the bulkhead, his watch cap pushed far back, a pasty faced man with a wisp of damp straw colored hair plastered against his brow gazed at Kline with the lackluster eyes of a dead fish.

"Kline?" he asked indifferently.

"Yes."

"I'm Johnson, the third."

He looked blankly at the hand which Kline held out, then took it without enthusiasm.

"The Old Man says we sail at once," offered Kline.

"Yee-ah. At once when Mr. Chief Mate Mullen gets on board." Johnson drawled the words in an empty voice that twanked like a broken banjo.

"So the Old Man said. It's Slug Mullen I suppose."

"Yee-ah." Johnson's voice twanked colorlessly but Kline thought a glimmer of interest stirred in the dull depths of his eyes.

"Drake seemed nervous," Kline hazarded. "How does he pull with Mullen."

"I wouldn't have any idea," Johnson said flabbily. "I got plenty to do."

"Safety first, eh?"

"I ain't hired to worry about how the

Old Man and the mate gets along."

"Okay," Kline turned again to his duffle bag. "What's to be done before we shove off?"

"She's all ready for sea," Johnson sighed. "You don't need to worry. There's coffee in the crew's mess." Fixing Kline with his fishy stare he lifted a limp thumb aft and went into the alleyway.

Suddenly the ship's whistle sent a banshee wail across the harbor waters.

Kline dropped his stuff and trotted aft in the dark. When he reached the poop three or four seamen were already slacking lines. Forward the anchor chain ground over the wildcat. Bells ringled below. Very slowly the squat *Cardogan* bestirred herself. Her faded blue funnel erupted greasy smoke. Her rusty water line dipped gently in the gathering wash. With a final shriek she shouldered her way into the black swell outside the breakwater.

In the darkness Kline fondled his long metal flashlight as if it were a weapon. Then Slug Mullen *was* on board.

Hate roiled his breast.

ROUNDING Cape Kara a fog, thick as wool and as dirty, closed down. The *Cardogan* wailing like a soul in purgatory, eased into the muck on a greasy swell.

Kline took the bridge at midnight. A thin mist drifted against his face and ran in rivulets from his storm clothes. By the signal box he made out the figure of Drake standing motionless in the gloom. The captain nervously rattled some keys against the marlinspike, sheathed in a sling, by the jackstay.

"Dirty weather, Kline," he growled as the second mate came upon him. "Damn bad coast. D'you know these waters?"

"Pretty well, sir. I've been in and out half a dozen times, maybe."

"Bad coast. Take it all in all it's a hellish part of the world."

The whistle, screaming, drowned Kline's reply.

"Did you say something?" Drake leaned toward him cupping an ear.

"Nothing important," Kline half shouted back. "Just that there's good and bad here same as any other place you could name."

"I suppose so. There's too many thieves and cut-throats here abouts though. Makes an honest man's skin crawl."

"Did Mr. Mullen get aboard safe, sir?" said Kline casually.

"What's that—Mullen? Yes, of course. What made you think of him, Mister?"

"Nothing special. I haven't come across him yet."

The whistle screamed, rocketing off into the fogbank.

"I might as well tell you," Drake stirred from the signal box. "Mullen don't like you, Kline. I guess you know that. Keep out of his way."

"I knew that. I suppose he gave a reason?"

"Something about a run-in you two had on the Lakes."

"That's right," Kline said coldly. "Well, I'll walk my side of a line, sir. Let Mullen keep to his."

"I won't have my officers fighting," Drake snorted. "And y'might as well get used to it."

"I'll keep to my side of a line, sir."

"You hear me, Mister," Drake warned him harshly. "I won't stand for trouble, understand?"

"I finished with Mullen ten years ago," Kline said quietly. "Now he turns up here. I can live with the devil in hell so he keeps to his own side of the house."

"And if he doesn't? How about that?"

Kline folded his dripping hands before him. His voice was calm and very cold.

"I'll work him up, sir. Same as he did Lambson."

"Lambson?" Drake voiced his unbe-

lief. "Why Lambson fell, fell into Number Two—clean to the tank tops."

"I guess he did, maybe." Kline leaned closer to Drake. "I'm not squawking, sir," he said tersely. "I know Slug Mullen and I saw Lambson. Slug worked him up. The hatch was an afterthought."

"Knifing Mullen won't get you anything," Drake muttered sourly.

Kline smiled tightly in the murk.

"Did you *see* Lambson, sir?" he asked.

"He was banged up bad. I sent him ashore right away."

"I know when a man's been worked up," said Kline. "I know the signs, Captain Drake. Lambson crossed Mullen and Mullen slugged him. Why? Ships routine? I don't think so. I'll keep an eye on Mullen, sir, and watch my step. It might save trouble if he knew."

"What do you mean, crossed him?"

"I was shipmates with Mullen on a Laker. He was a sea lawyer and a crook, a fo'c's'le bully and rotten yellow to the core."

"That's rough talk."

"Mullen has gone out of his way to scuttle me with you. I'm only saying what's true."

"You've said enough."

"Mullen is yellow," Kline said bitterly. "He'll work in the dark. It might help some if he knew I was ready for him."

Johnson, gliding from the ladder, stoppered Drake's reply.

"The mate thought you might want double watches until the weather clears," he intoned drearily.

"You tell the mate to—" Drake began furiously. "Not necessary," he growled, coldly wrathful, an instant later. "The fog is clearing. I'll be inside if you want me."

His rubber clothes slithered against the hand rails going down.

"What has Mullen got on the Old Man?" said Kline.

Johnson leaned slackly against the signal box.

"I wouldn't know," he said indifferently. "What do you think?"

"I knew Mullen a few years ago," Kline said with a tentative air.

"Yee-ah." Johnson was noncommittal. "So what?"

"Why did Mullen slug Lambson?"

"You found that out, did you? Well!"

"Yeah. Not even Mullen would slug a man and heave him into an open hatch for no reason at all."

"I suppose not," Johnson said drily.

"So as I see it Lambson caught Mullen at some skull-duggery, or Mullen discovered Lambson was wise to him." Kline paused. "The Old Man is in it somewhere."

Johnson straightened up.

"I try to keep clear of the Old Man and the mate too," he said coldly. "I got trouble enough, Kline."

"Okay," Kline agreed easily. "Only get this. Mullen is working a grudge for me. Keep clear, Mister."

When Johnson was gone Kline hung over the dodger listening to the heavy throb of the screw. A light breeze drove the cold mist swirling into his face.

What was it? He wondered. Repeal had killed the booze racket. Dope? Mullen had dabbled in that on the Lakes before the Federal dicks got too hot. It might be diamonds, or even alien smuggling, although that was mostly Westcoast stuff. Whatever the game was, Drake was in it. In spite of his sea-dog growl he acted as if he hadn't much water under his keel. And Johnson. A fey duck he was with his tin voice and dead pan, but he wasn't as dumb as he looked. All in all a sure enough queer set up—and Mullen was at the bottom of it.

Through the long hours Kline held his post by the weather cloth and stared into the murk. The ship, laboring easily, surged and splashed wailing her eerie warning and spilling ghostly foam from her forefoot.

As eight bells went Mullen bulked at

the stairhead and Kline crossed to him.

"Pretty thick yet," he said easily. "The Old Man wants a call if it gets any worse. Steering one-fifty-seven standard. Half speed."

"Lettin' on yuh don't know me?" Mullen sneered. "Okay."

"I know you, Mullen."

"Damn right you do!" Mullen snorted truculently. "I'm chief officer aboard, Kline, and you're gonna toe the mark."

"I know my business, Mister Mullen," Kline said coldly. "You won't get anything on me."

Mullen snickered.

"Sez you," he crowed nastily.

"Keep to your side of a line, Mullen," Kline said in an icy voice.

Mullen turned and leered at him out of the fog.

"Still shootin' bull," he croaked. "Y'ain't changed a bit since you crawfished in the *Donegal*."

Kline stiffened and stepped close balling his fists.

"Get below, Mister," Mullen snarled. "This is my watch. Get off the bridge!"

Kline pulled up. Stepping back his hands were open and swinging loosely by his sides. Without a word he crossed to the stairhead. From the ladder he called back. The sweetness of contempt . . . in his voice.

"Don't forget, Mr. Mullen," he said. "Call the Old Man if the weather gets worse."

KLINE shifted restlessly in his bunk behind the locked door.

"The *Donegal!*"

Ten years had gone into the job of undoing the work of one night. Mullen's work. And now Mullen was putting the sting on him again.

As if it had been yesterday Kline saw the madly plunging poop of the *Donegal*. Underfoot, sleet had laid a slick coating on the plates. A curtain of it borne on the wings of a sixty-mile gale slanted across the deck. It had stung the men crouched there with the cruelty of a wire lash. The gale tearing down from the freezing coast of Labrador whipped the Great Lakes to a fury the Atlantic seldom knew.

Kline saw himself crouched by a broken stanchion. Behind him Mullen snubbed the lashing that held them both. With a rope's end caught through a ringbolt, Zwinger, the mate, strained outboard trying with his eyes to penetrate the dark.

Kline lived the freezing hours through again, whipped numb by sleet and hail and swirling ice cold spray. Somewhere out there a foundered ship, a broken thing, her masts by the board and her rigging a murderous tangle on deck, danced in a hell-broth of broken water. A slender thread bound her to the heaving poop of the *Donegal*. Line after line, passed in the teeth of blistering wind and sleet, had, at first held—then parted. Seven hours the *Donegal* stood by, fighting disaster. One by one with a crack and whistle the lines went. And after seven hours of it the men on the poop were, in body and spirit, as worn and broken as the lines that snapped and were no more.

Then there was one left. A new hemp hawser creaking and groaning around the bits. It slackened and drew, drawing with it the straining wills and bodies of the men who heard it thrum like the string of a bass fiddle. Then it eased and they breathed again, eased and slacked only to draw creaking while the poop of the *Donegal* swung high then fell, twisting and a sea broke over the rail, laying them all flat.

In a single stunning instant it was over. The line with the sound of a shot pistol let go. The three men crouched, too stunned to move. Nothing more to do. They had held on like seamen—loyal to the tradition of their kind. But now the lines were gone and the *Donegal* herself was fighting to clear the reef that reached for her.

Zwinger had sent them below. Stumbling down, Kline tripped over a piece of loose gear and took it with him. Sheltered beneath the poop he looked at the thing. It was a hand-axe with fragments of hemp line clinging to the blade!

He hadn't got it at first. It was too incredible. There had been three men on the poop. He had not used the axe. Zwinger was in front of him in plain sight. Mullen had been behind them both, and he had jarred hard against Kline as the poop lifted clear of the breaking sea.

He had turned on Mullen then, accusation hot on his tongue, and saw guilt in Mullen's red-rimmed eyes; saw it in the trembling half-frozen blue of him. Mullen's craven soul had cracked. He had gone yellow in the pinch.

Then Mullen had set up a howl, telling Zwinger that Kline had parted the line with a hand-axe.

He nearly killed Mullen before Zwinger got the axe from him. The sight of Mullen still and bleeding on the deck had cooled his wrath. Zwinger went back to the poop. He held the end of the line towards Kline when he came down. It had been severed clean as a whistle, sheared off as only an axe stroke can cut a taut hawser.

When the *Donegal* made port the Commissioner heard the case. Mullen, in bandages, swore he saw Kline deliver the stroke. Later, when he shouted the truth to Mr. Zwinger, Kline attacked him with the axe. Zwinger could add nothing but regrets. Kline had always been a dependable man. It was a pretty frame-up on Mullen's part and neither explanations or pleas could overcome the circumstantial certainty of Kline's guilt. In the end Mullen had been suspended and Kline—beached.

He had been fired, beached, and blackballed in every ship sailing the Great Lakes. Kline, boatswain, had parted the line that was a thin thread of hope to desperate men hanging bitterly to the wreck of their ship; "Yellow" Kline, with a blackball and the cold contempt of sailormen wherever he went.

Two bitter years he was on the beach. One year deck swab on a scow. Eight years to win back the respect of the hard men who go to the sea, and on the Great Lakes, in ships.

Two years ago he sailed second mate in the *Williwaw*, a respected officer with the good wishes of everyone.

Now Mullen, the same yellow brass-bound bully, was ranking him here and raking up the affair of the *Donegal*.

Kline's fingers bit into the bed clothes.

Soon after dawn the *Cardogan* cleared the fog. In one moment she was a shrouded ghost in a world of macabre figures shaped of the mist. Another, and a pearly blue sea all asparkle with sunlight spread fairylike before her. Astern the fog bank lowered, retreating. The *Cardogan* stepped her speed up to a smart ten knots.

Although other fogs seemed to dissolve with the sunlight, suspense hung heavy over the corroded decks of the tramp. Mullen was gruff, but stayed within the circle of his rights. Kline avoided him and watched narrowly for storm signals. Drake kept to his room. Johnson alone ambled from task to task in his usual aimless dead-eyed way.

Fair weather held until Cape Matapan lay fair abeam. Then, mounting through the afternoon from sharp squalls, a fresh gale from the southwest pushed the sea into half mountains and lambasted the aged *Cardogan* until she resounded like a worn out kettle-drum. On a course for Spartivento she had the wind abeam and half seas boiling into her well decks.

Mullen in storm clothes and sea boots stalked the flying bridge. To windward a low lying freighter spilled seawater from her bows, and careening, plunged merrily in until the sea boiled over her forepeak.

Kline watched a moment, then hurried

across the slanting well deck to sound forward. Coming back he had reached the main deck ladder when a sudden roistering graybeard, higher than the rest, roared over the side in a smother of foam. Kline caught the ladder treads and hung on. Sea-water boiled high around him and tore at his straining arms. Leaning against the force of it, he, with a split second knowledge of danger, lurched sideways holding to the ladder rail. Something clunked heavily into the water before him.

The ship rose to the mighty thrust of the sea. Seawater cascaded from the port-side storm scuppers and Kline stood clear but for a sloshing inch or two that rolled an iron marlin-spike to and fro. He scooped it up and headed for the flying bridge. Half way up he paused, lifted the spike, and regarded it thoughtfully. Then a dry chuckle came alive in his throat and he turned back. Below he stowed the sounding rod and spike before going in to mess.

Mullen was there. He glanced briefly at Kline and hid his face behind a coffee cup.

Drake paused over his soup.

"Wells dry, Kline? No seawater?"

"They're dry enough to bury a man in if you had to," Kline replied mirthlessly.

"That's a hell of an idea. Feeling bad?"

"Me? I'm fine," Kline said gently. "Except for wet pants I never felt better."

Drake grinned. "Wet pants? Hell, that's nothing! Been wet before, boy and man."

"I picked up a marlinspike on the forward well deck." Kline spoke of it as a treasure luckily found.

Mullen blinked, holding the cup right to his mouth.

"Marlinspikes belong in the tool locker," Drake rumbled. "Shake up the bo's'n, Mr. Mullen."

"Bo's'n's all right, Captain. This came from the signal box," said Kline.

Drake's eyes darted angrily. "How the devil'd it get on deck?"

"The spike was in place when I came down." Mullen's eyes flickered to Drake then, centered in the bottom of his cup.

"Guess I'm wrong then," said Kline. "Sorry. I spoke too fast."

"Shake up the bo's'n, Mr. Mullen. The wind's freshening, isn't it?"

" 'Bout the same when I came down." There was a noticeable easing of Mullen's manner as he spoke. Kline caught it.

"More sea then. The old girl takes on some in a sea." Drake grinned wryly. "Keep a good watch on top, some old hooker's liable to barge down on us. Guess I'll go up."

Kline followed, continuing to the flying bridge where Johnson, on relief, incuriously watched him sheath the spike on the signal box. Then Kline slithered down on the weather side. The deck rose wildly to meet him. A great gray coamer roared breaking outboard above the rail. Kline watched his chance. The deck swung down. He hit it running and skidded around the house to his quarters.

The gale lulled briefly then freshened from the eastward. The *Cardogan* added a corkscrew twist to her other antics. Under the urge of the wind, giant coamers pooped her with a roar that jarred her rivets. The wind moaned through her rigging. Flying spray hammered her superstructure. The decks heaved and tilted.

In Mullen's room the racked water bottle clucked stolidly in its security.

At eight o'clock Mullen came down. Standing, legs spread, he poured a long drink into his throat.

The door latched behind him.

Mullen swung around. The brutal jaw of the man came forward. His beefy face blotched red and purple. Murder, and fear too, looked out from his little red-rimmed eyes.

"Get out of my room, Kline," he roared.

"Shed your sweater and boots," Kline said dismally. "I'm going to work you up."

Mullen's face twitched with murderous wrath.

"I'll slaughter you," he snarled. His big hand tightened around the whiskey bottle.

"No spikes here, Slug," Kline said tauntingly. "Get out of those boots or fight with them on."

The whiskey bottle whirled across the room and crashed where Kline's head had been.

An instant the two men faced each other, one planted, snarling, his shoulders hunched forward; the other moving slowly, smoothly, across the two feet separating them. Like figures in a slow motion film they drifted together.

"You——" said Kline, and struck.

TEN minutes later the door of Mullen's room slammed back and Kline stepped into the alleyway. From waist to shoulder his clothes hung in tattered rags. A smear of blood swept like a flaming scimitar across his body. Dark blood oozed from a deep gash in his chin.

Unbeaten and challenging he swayed in the feeble glow of the alley light. His eyes blazed over the little group crowded into the passageway.

Drake was the first to find his voice.

"By God it's mutiny!" he raged. "Get to your quarters, Kline."

Ignoring him, Kline took a slopping fire bucket from the alley rack. Stepping back he heaved the stinging salt water over Mullen who lay, face down, among the wreckage of his cabin.

"I warned you, Drake," Kline said bitterly. "Mullen heaved that spike at me—and I have scuppered him."

"I should say you have," Drake croaked. "Great God, get him up! Give him a drink."

Together they propped Mullen against his bunk.

"He'll come around," Kline said drily. "With a skull like that? Hell!"

Mullen sagged drunkenly. Drake thrust a drink beneath his nose and he took it.

"Stand up, Mullen!" Drake blustered. "What the hell do you mean by heaving spikes in my ship." He thumped Mullen's ribs and shouted. "I'll put you in irons, by God!"

Mullen sullenly lifted his puffed and battered face.

"Lay off the grandstand stuff, Drake," he growled. "G'wan to the quarter deck where yuh b'long."

"By God, Mullen—" Drake spluttered.

Mouthing a broken oath, Mullen deliberately cuffed him with his open hand.

"Mutiny! It's mutiny, Mullen!" Drake roared. "I'll——"

"G'wan," Mullen snarled. "Get out!"

After dawn the gale moderated. The sun shone. Like a half-drowned rat the *Cardogan* doggedly pounded toward Sicily and the Tyhrrenian Sea beyond.

Drake and Mullen had it out after breakfast. Over the clatter of chipping hammers their angry voices seesawed back and forth an hour or more. Then Mullen, black with rage came down.

Drake snapped and snarled about the quarterdeck. Through the mid-watch he tramped the lee wing or clung scowling to the jack stay. He had Kline on the carpet by nightfall. In a fine rage he slammed his clenched fist on the table.

"Once more, Mister, and by God, I'll iron both of you," he told Kline bitterly.

"He tried to kill me."

"He says it's a lie," Drake retorted. "Don't trifle with me."

"Nobody saw him throw the spike," Kline said patiently. "I put it back in place."

"Don't give me any lip, Kline," Drake snapped. "I can break you."

Something went in Kline. Discipline, respect of the Master's sanctity, fell

away before a greater sense of injustice.

"That's your privilege, sir," he said in a hard voice. "What about Mullen? What about a mate who slaps the Master and orders him to his quarters."

"That's my affair, Mister," Drake said pompously.

"And mine," Kline snapped. "What's he got on you?"

Drake reared up, raging. He flung his chair back against the wall. "Get below!" he roared. "I'll beach you next port."

Kline touched his cap. "Mullen is boss-man on this hooker, Captain," he said coolly. "I'm going to know why."

Drake followed him to the stairhead.

"Tomorrow you can get down into the holds, Kline and shift the stuff yourself. Maybe you won't be so fresh when you come up."

Kline shrugged. Mullen had Drake in his pocket, and Drake knew it. He feared something—something big.

Tomorrow dawned gray and forbidding. Rain squalls whirling up from the murky horizon swept hissing over a turbulent sea that tumbled and rolled in great green masses. Right up to the coast of Sicily rapidly veering winds harassed the laboring *Cardogan*. The treacherous currents of Messina Strait foamed and swirled under pressure of a northerly gale that whipped the Tyrennhian Sea to the northward.

Aboard the *Cardogan* Drake stubbornly laid a course for the flash of Razzatti on the Sardinian coast, and the narrow channel of Bonifacio Strait, beyond.

Peril from without had made temporary allies of his officers. Tradition, steeped in the sea's salt brine, united them in defense of the ship. Suspicion and hatred bided, awaiting a propitious moment.

The gale had died and the Strait of Bonifacio lay coal black, still, and sinister when the *Cardogan,* worn with incessant strife, nosed into its calm waters. Pinpricks of light, in many colors, flashed and twinkled along the Corsican and Sardinian shores.

On the *Cardogan's* bridge Drake commanded his ship. With his night glasses swinging he identified the approaching shore beacons and checked them with Mullen, who stood by his elbow.

"We're closing in," Mullen said cryptically.

"Better have him up," Drake muttered. "Ask Mr. Kline to come up," he told the wheelsman. "Mr. Mullen will take the wheel."

At half speed Drake was carefully entering the Strait when Kline reported.

"Seems you ain't so good at stowing cargo," Drake said with a sarcastic laugh.

"What's wrong," Kline countered evenly.

"Mr. Mullen says there's a good deal of shift in Number Three hold. Maybe you don't remember it, Mister, but I told you to restow the cargo in this vessel three days ago."

"Number Three was stowed hard and fast last time I saw it," Kline retorted. "But of course, if Mr. Mullen has been down there—" He left the balance unspoken.

"It ain't stowed hard and fast now, then," Drake growled. "So get on down there and put it right."

Kline touched his cap in a mocking gesture of respect.

"Right away, sir," he agreed pleasantly, and went down.

In the stygian darkness of the lower hold the beam of his flash lamp picked out a jumble of boxes which Kline knew he had seen securely piled and fastened a few days before.

While he sweated the displaced freight into proper order and buttressed it with mustard seed in two-hundred-pound sacks his mind sought the reason for this job of minor sabotage. From a stowage or safety standpoint it was a joke. Clearly Drake and Mullen wanted

him out of the way for awhile. Maybe this was the pay-off.

Kline heaved a sack of seed to his shoulder and dropped it as feet grated on the ladder across the hold.

With his fingers gripping the pistol holstered beneath his arm Kline turned to face—Johnson! The mournful third mate, with his hands folded loosely before him, sagged against the ladder. Kline swung the flashlamp's beam full on him while he cradled the pistol in his hand.

"You belong on the bridge, Johnson," he said coldly. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you. My business with you is friendly and important," Johnson said calmly.

"Spill it," said Kline. "I'll judge if it's friendly or not."

"That's fine," Johnson agreed. "Put your gat up."

"Quit stalling. What's your game?"

"I'm trailing Mullen. Does that interest you?"

"It might. Are you a company spotter?"

"No."

"Underwriter's man?"

"Wrong again."

"All right. You tell me. Whose man are you and what made you think I would tie in with you?"

Johnson straightened up and he seemed to turn a question over in his mind. Then his eyes seemed to focus, in a sort of blind stare, on the glowing center of Kline's lamp.

"Mullen tried to crack your skull with a marlinspike," he said slowly, "and you certainly did an expert job of beating him up. That made me think you might play along with me. I'm a Federal Man, Kline." He paused an instant and then went on. "I want Mullen and Drake. If I get them with the goods they will go to the Atlanta Big House for a vacation."

"A Federal dick," Kline said warily. "Let's have some proof of that."

Johnson extended his left hand, and came closer. In the palm of his hand a piece of bright metal and enamel glistened.

"Justice Department. Narcotic Section," he said conversationally. "I'll show you papers if you will put that damned rod away."

"For a Federal dick you seem damned scared of a gun."

"That's right," said Johnson. "I don't like guns. When I draw mine it goes off right away and somebody is dead."

"Okay," said Kline warming a little. "Shower down some identification. If you're *right,* I'm your man."

"Good." Johnson laid a thin book in the light before Kline. "Is that what you want?"

"Fair enough," said Kline, holstering his gun. "Where do we begin?"

"Can't tell exactly. Have you found anything that looks like dope down here?" Johnson's drawl was fading now.

"No."

"Have you been through all the holds?"

"All but One and Two."

"We'll go there."

"How did you get away from Drake on the bridge?"

Johnson chuckled.

"I slipped away soon after he sent you down here. Drake is pretty hot under the collar, I suppose. He may as well get used to it because with a little luck I'll give him the biggest pain in the neck he ever had."

"Dope," Kline murmured thoughtfully. "Lambson was found in Number Two."

"How's that?" Johnson cut in.

"I was thinking about Lambson." Kline's eyes began to glitter with suppressed excitement. "If he stumbled on Mullen's cache of hop and Mullen caught him—by God, Johnson!" he cried. "That's what happened. Lambson caught up with Mullen's stuff and Mul-

len crowned him. Then to cover up Mullen dropped him from the 'tween deck to the tank top."

"You think the stuff is, or was, in Number Two 'tween deck. That right?" Johnson said sharply.

"Positively. Another thing. When I spoke to Drake about Lambson he said, like this: 'He walked right off the 'tween deck, I'm afraid it finished him.' The 'tween deck. Why did he say 'tween deck?"

"Hold up. You're just guessing. Let's stick to——"

"A cargo door, some wartime shipyard freak, opens from Number Two 'tween deck. We never use it. All our freight comes over the topside. But if you wanted to drop something quietly... Get the idea?"

"You may be right," said Johnson. "There's mixed freight, small stuff, in there. Lots of boxes and cans. Let's have a look."

During their talk a change had come over Johnson. His flabby indifference had stiffened into resolution and he no longer looked or acted like a shiftless deck-hand. Rather he was a loose-jowled hound intent upon smelling out a stale scent before dashing off, silent and implacable, on the trail of his quarry.

"Let's go," said Kline.

WITH Johnson at his heels he swarmed up the ladder. In silence they climbed the narrow courses until Kline with a word of warning halted and flashed his lamp on the manhole cover above his head. Bracing his body he thrust upward with his free hand. The cover stood fast. Impatiently he tried again and then spurred by a sudden thought took hold of the bolt-ends and shook.

The door stood immovable.

Kline turned to Johnson with a muttered imprecation.

"The cover is dogged down outside. They've shut us in."

"We'll have to try the ventilators," Johnson called back hoarsely. "Make it snappy. The fat is frying, sure enough!"

One glance into the roomy ventilator funnels was enough. Kline swore softly.

"They're plugged with wadded canvas," he growled.

"They would be," Johnson said philosophically. "Only a sap would dog the manhole down and leave the vents open. We'll fool them."

He flipped a pistol from his pocket and began a systematic tapping against the ventilators, going from one to another, while Kline fumed.

"What the hell good is that," he snorted. "That noise wouldn't catch the attention of a steamboat inspector, let alone some deck-hand."

"You have the makings of a good dick," Johnson said tapping away. "But you need experience. Ah!"

Kline tensed. Johnson laid his ear close to the circular tube of the ventilator.

A series of faint but staccato taps traveled through the metal. Johnson tapped rapidly when the signal ceased. A quick reply followed, then silence.

"Stand by for a line," Johnson said shortly.

"Who is up there," demanded Kline.

"Take a tip from an old hand," Johnson chuckled. "Never leave anything to Old Dame chance. She'll two-time you sure. That's my shadow up there."

In the darkness above their heads a great rasping and scraping broke out and a few seconds later cool sweet air flowed over them. A long moment passed in silence. Suddenly a heavy line hissed through the funnel and thumped to the deck at their feet.

A muffled voice that seemed to float in the air about them said softly.

"All fast here. The mate just went aft. The Old Man is on the bridge. See you later."

On deck, Kline dropped behind the hatch coaming where Johnson waited.

"Mullen is aft," Johnson whispered. "Get into Number Two quick. Don't go by the manhole. If Mullen comes back he'll notice it's unfastened."

Kline led off, slipping noiselessly among the shadows of the well-deck. Behind him Johnson drifted like a wraith from one concealment to another.

Beneath the curved maw of the ventilator Kline paused.

"Good luck," said Johnson.

Kline swung up and the gaping black hole swallowed him. In a trice Johnson followed.

Kline was prowling among cans and boxes when Johnson dropped on deck.

"Take a look at that cargo door," he said triumphantly. "There's half an inch of cup grease on the hinges and the lock gear is slick with oil."

"Douse the lamp," Johnson hissed sharply.

In tense silence they listened to heavy boots scrape over the deck plates outside. The sounds continued aimlessly through what seemed like endless moments. Then a nearby funnel creaked and clattered with the strain of a heavy body climbing into it.

Johnson drew Kline back among the loosely piled bales of a rug shipment from Syria.

They had barely crouched, well hidden, when a man dropped on deck, muttering curses. The beam of a flashlamp sprang out and swept around the hold. Then it came back to rest on the body of its owner.

Kline's finger sank into Johnson's arm as Mullen's heavy features stood clear in the lamplight.

Murmuring maledictions Mullen fingered a ragged tear in his flannel shirt and gingerly exposed a raw laceration that blazed redly on his stomach. Having satisfied himself that the wound was not as serious as the biting pain indicated, Mullen swung his lamp on the cargo door and, after some fumbling, pushed the door outward with his foot.

Through the now open cargo door a shore light flashed red, then green, then red again. While Kline and Johnson watched, it passed astern and another, this one red alone, flashed three times—was dark, then flashed again. Mullen mumbled and moved back. A tiny beam of light shone on a heap of olive oil cans. In the circle of its glow they saw Mullen's hands slide over the edges of the cans, singling out one, discarding another. Presently he had thirty cans set aside. The light went out. The cans rattled on the deck plates.

A growing shadow bulked in the dim square of the cargo door. The flashing red light was nearly abeam now. They saw Mullen crouch and stare downward. Then he snapped erect and dropped something over the side. Far below they heard a faint splash.

Without another glance at the water Mullen jettisoned can after can as fast as he could lift and flung them clear of the slowly moving *Cardogan*.

Among the bales Kline pressed Johnson back.

"If he fights leave him to me," he whispered.

Then with his gun leveled he stepped clear and switched his lamp on his enemy.

Mullen stood still with a gleaming can in one hand while with the other he warded off the blinding ray of Kline's torch.

"I'll kill you if you move, Mullen," Kline said harshly.

A single breathless instant they stood rigid. Then Mullen slung the can and dropped. Kline's gun boomed between the narrow walls of the hold—and boomed again. The heavy can bore him crashing to the deck. He sprang up, but Mullen was already on him. Something seared his arm and he flung away, reaching for the knife that was somewhere in the dark above him. He rolled aside sensing a blow and heard the knife chinch into dunnage boards beside him.

He snatched at it, felt the hilt, and then he was locked with Mullen who grunted curses in his ear as he strained to free his arm.

Strained together at death grips, they worked from their prone position until they stood bolt upright. Mullen dashed his head against Kline's jaw and bore him back toward the partly clear square of the hatch. A vision of Lambson flashed through Kline's head. He pivoted and came clear. Now it was Mullen who fought to keep away from the deadly opening. They strained to and fro. Kline silently, Mullen grunting oaths through clenched teeth.

Fighting desperately, Mullen forced his way back from the yawning lip of the open hatch. Then Kline set himself and Mullen's progress stopped. A long minute they strained in a gruelling test of strength—and Mullen gave ground. Kline grunted his satisfaction and pushed on. Mullen twisted suddenly, breaking Kline's grip; and Kline, thinking to clear the down thrust of Mullen's knife, sprang back. Beneath his feet his forgotten electric torch rolled forward throwing him heavily to the deck. Mullen roared triumphantly and sprang in.

A light, sharp as the whitened blade of a knife, cut the blackness.

"Stand, Mullen!" Johnson's empty metallic voice halted them both. Kline remembered it had reminded him of a broken banjo.

"Drop it!"

The gun slammed, jarring Kline's eardrums. He saw Mullen, the knife flaccid in his curling fingers, swaying in the light of the torch.

"Johnson," Mullen muttered. "You tripe-faced—" He straightened jerkily, his knife hand snapped back. Kline flung himself forward to block the throw. The knife chunked solidly into his body spinning him with a cry of pain against the baled rugs.

Johnson's gun slammed again, and Mullen tumbled forward on hands and knees. A great cough shook him as, with a terrific effort, he struggled erect. His little red-rimmed eyes flamed and he tottered. Then the light went out of his face and he collapsed, spilling backwards over the piled cans into the sea.

In the rigid silence the shore light glowed redly for an instant and was gone.

"You hurt bad, Kline?" said Johnson concernedly.

"Not bad," Kline said hoarsely. "It's in my chest near the shoulder. Hurts like hell."

"I'll go topside and open the manhole."

On deck, Johnson propped Kline against the bulwark while he let go a pale green rocket from the brass pistol he took from a pocket.

At once, half a point on the port bow, a searchlight bloomed, shedding a pale glow across the deck.

"You saved my bacon, Kline," Johnson said brusquely. "At that distance no knife-thrower worth his salt could have missed."

"Lay aloft," Kline muttered gruffly, "and get that buzzard Drake."

"Good!" Johnson turned away. "Get a ladder down, Mister." He strode off, gun in hand, towards the bridge.

Kline stepped shakily to the port side. A long gray two-funnelled ship, mounting guns, sidled across the bow. As he watched, a cutter dashed away, followed by another. They swept to starboard of the now drifting *Cardogan* and opened smartly with machine guns mounted forward. Red fire streaked from a cluster of fishing boats chugging frantically shoreward. The cutters separated, circling the fleeing boats. A stream of tracers hemmed them in.

Johnson slipped unhurriedly down the main deck ladder.

"French Coast Guard," he said. "Take the bridge, Mr. Kline. Sparks is bringing compresses and bandage. I'll tend the ladder."

FOUR hours later, under a star-sparked sky, the *Cardogan* lifted her blunt bows to the surging Mediterranean.

"Ring off the engines, Mr. Johnson," Kline said curtly.

The stuttering bells whirred, were answered, and fell silent.

"Now let's have the dirt."

Johnson hung slack against the rail.

"Drake is gone," he said solemnly. "From the quartermaster's story he must have broken badly when he realized the game was up. He didn't even try for a rope's end to let himself down easy. Instead he went over the bridge rail. It's thirty feet to the water. Maybe he made it. If he did he's meat for the French. If he didn't, he can keep Mullen company."

"He was in with Mullen then?" Kline asked, though he knew the answer.

"Cheek and elbow. We have been after that pair for two years. We'd probably be hunting them yet if Mullen hadn't doublecrossed some of the New York boys who were backing him. We hooked up with the French and Italians. They wanted to know how the stuff was reaching Bonifacio and Messina. Mullen was smart. The stuff, with a heavy greasing of official palms probably, came aboard with other cargo—in this case with a shipment of olive oil in cans. Still I hadn't wised to it when you came aboard. You were my break. You see, Kline, I knew about you and Mullen."

"Routine check-up, I suppose?" Kline jeered lightly.

"Yes. We looked Mullen's record up after we got a line on him."

"And you heard about the *Donegal*."

"Yee-ah," Johnson said slowly. "You were the black-hearted villain of that piece, all right. I had my doubts after I saw Mullen. Then at Salonika you turned up."

"It was a job," Kline explained.

"Well, maybe you didn't do so bad at that."

"That remains to be seen. What's your next move?"

"Me? I'm done. Of course, they say, 'Once a Sailor Always a Sailor.' I'd been to sea, that's why I got the assignment. I'll hit for Washington when I get back."

Sparks trotted up the ladder, going to Kline.

"Answer to your message, sir," he said.

"By the way, Kline," Johnson said. "Meet my friend, wireless operator Sweeney. Sweeney has kept me in touch with our people at home and abroad. It was a little irregular but, Sweeney is a great little shadower, too. If he wasn't we would still be in Number Three."

"Thanks for the flowers," Sweeney grinned. "How about a geranium for that button hole Mullen opened in Mr. Kline's chest. A couple of inches lower and our Mr. Kline would be only a memory."

"My number wasn't up," said Kline. "But you couldn't expect Mullen to know that."

He spread the message and read it aloud by the light from the binnacle.

Confirm Kline Master pending arrival home port. Proceed on regular schedule. Sloane, G. M.

"Sloane," said Sweeney. "He's the *big* boss."

"It's a break for me," Kline told him.

"You had it coming," said Johnson.

"You'll go mate, Mr. Johnson?"

Johnson nodded loosely.

"Okay!" Kline straightened. A new force seemed to flow through him and to touch his voice with command.

"Shake up the bo's'n, Sweeney," he said. "Tell him to clean the red lead off his ticket. We'll be short an officer into New York."

"Aye, sir." For perhaps the first time in his irreverent career Sweeney touched his cap. Respect was in the gesture.

ICE

By BILL ADAMS

You ask me what is worst of all? The week-long gale, the sudden squall?
Of what on all the heaving sea brings chilling fear the nearest me?
Oh, I've fought fire, and I've fought fog, full many a time, and heaved my log,
Where close beneath a sullen sea the sharp reefs waited murderously,
And the green shark bided with evil eye to help a gallant ship's crew die.
I've heard the liner's siren wail where never catspaw flapped my sail,
And I lay becalmed on her mist-hid course while she loomed with the speed of a racing horse.
And I waited tense in the midnight drear to see if she'd hit or barely clear.
Aye, I've known all peril of the deep! Narrow harbor with foreshore steep
And lighthouse where no lamp was lit because some knave'd forgotten it;
And the slow old tramp that lit no light but saved her oil throughout the night
And missed my sharp wind-driven bow by half the toss of a biscuit throw.
I've felt the mad typhoon's crazed breath, and the hurricane howling for my death,
And my sails have been all of them blown to hell by the black pampero's sudden yell;
And once my plates were nicely nicked by the drifting spars of a derelict.
I've all but lost my ship with crews that came aboard so full of booze
That to go to sea was a madman's trick. My orders were to clear her quick!
The tide was right, and I must go. So many men want jobs, you know!
You hesitate, your job is lost; for greedy owners can't be crossed.
And I've had fool young reckless mates unfit to hold certificates.
They'd got 'em somehow. Mine the pain! They learned e'er I came in again.
The pampered pets of owner's friends, I twisted them to suit my ends.
All up and down, and here and there, be weather wild or weather fair,
It is the sailing skipper's share to doubt, and doubting have to dare.
God help us skippers everywhere!
The oceans watch you, and the sky. You pile on sail and make her fly;
And keep forever lip and eye as placid and as steely seeming
As though all peril were but dreaming. Of squall, and gale, and fog, and fire,
Of derelict, and owner's ire, of cyclone and of hurricane,
I've seen my share and shall again. I've beaten worthless crews to worth
And with them circled all the earth. I've taught my mates their navigation
To fit them rightly for their station. Alone, a skipper (and a serf)
I've made my way about the earth.
The worst is when at close of day, when night is falling black as ink,
You see ahead the gray ice-blink; the grim gray mist that hangs around
In latitudes where bergs are found. Chill grips you then. There are no stars.
You cannot see your lower spars. You seem to hear the Lutine bell
That tolls at Lloyd's the lost ships knell.
Icy the air, as on you go; hoping to pass amidst the floe.
It is the sailing skipper's share to doubt, and doubting have to dare.
God help us skippers everywhere!

White man's ambition—and headhunter's gold——

LOST HEADS

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

ANDERSON had his binoculars to his eyes as he lay flat close to men in the jungle. He was looking out between leaves into the valley of the Mawa River below us. Headhunters were down there. They wanted to prevent us from reaching the river —and also to take our heads.

"There it is again," said Anderson in a whisper. "Watch to the right of the top of the rock. And, damn it, keep that rifle cocked."

I could not see anything near the rock. It was more than a hundred yards below us, sticking up through the top of the jungle that sloped away from us down a hogback. It was just after noon. The valley steamed. Sweat trickled through my hair and formed little rivulets running behind my ears.

All night and through the forenoon we caught glimpses of hillmen after us. I was content to have my head on my shoulders, even if my ears did drip. It was anybody's bet how long my head would stay where it was.

"See it? Popped up again—*get it!*"

I caught a small whitish patch in the green below, near the rock, something thrust upward through the leaves. My cheek dropped to the stock of my rifle. My sights hunted through the green leaves that caged me and dropped on the white spot. My bullet would have to hit below the white object.

Next I knew, one of Anderson's hairy paws was thrust through the vines toward me. His fingers grasped the muz-

zle of the rifle just as I was putting the squeeze on the trigger. My bullet went high.

Drums answered it. The valley rumbled with the echoes of my rifle shot and the vibrations of the drums.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked Anderson. "Are you opposed to me hitting headhunters?"

"My error," said Anderson placidly. His glasses were at his eyes again. Tobacco juice drooled from the near corner of his mouth. He was too busy to spit.

I was mad. "Thought it was mine. You tell me to shoot at something and then you throw my muzzle up. I hope they fry the fat out of your head when they get it."

Anderson's binocular continued to bore into the slopes below us. "Want to kill a white man?" he asked.

"White man! We're the only white men on this island."

"Keep looking at that stone. Kill that white man if you want to, but we might find him handy if we let him come up the hill and join us."

"How do you know it's a white man?"

"That was a dirty white helmet. Got wise after I told you to hit it. He's been sticking it up for us to see for some time. Neighborly kind of a guy, but he hates to get shot."

There was no particular reason why Anderson should be right. I was certain we were the only white men so short of brains as to be on that island. It was no fit place for white men. Head houses in the valley below us were full of their brainless heads.

But Anderson was bound to get some of the gold nuggets from the banks of the Mawa River. He had with him, in a shoulder roll made from a blanket, a dozen heads. They looked like human heads, having been fully made in a civilized factory at home. I was witless enough to stay with him in partnership. As he had spent years trading among savages, Anderson usually had a good game.

I shook the sweat out of my eyes. "White man!" I scoffed. "You're jungle drunk and the sun has addled your brains like a grocery egg that's been forgotten behind the canned beans."

"Lay off me and watch that rock," retorted Anderson.

In a few minutes I saw something waver above the carpet of green.

"That's an old helmet," said Anderson.

"Why not give him a hail?"

"Hay-*oo!*" bawled Anderson. "Come out of that and say something."

The helmet disappeared among the leaves. Then a head appeared in the same spot—a sunburned brown head. "What the hell are you shootin' at me for?" demanded a hoarse voice.

"We thought—you was—a native." Anderson's voice shook the hills across the valley from us. Even the drums stopped talking.

"We been tryin'—to git up to you—all mornin'—but you keep shootin' at us."

"All right. Come along."

"Run out of ammunition—you come down."

"Safer for you—come this way."

"Natives got us surrounded."

"How many of you?"

"Two, now—"

"What're you doin' here?"

"Prospectin' for gold—in the river."

"Stay where you are and we'll go for you."

The helmet waved. "Mister, we wish you luck." The helmet disappeared.

Anderson got himself loose from the vines and stood up. He slipped the blanket roll over his head, tightened his ammunition belt and wiped the sweat out of his eyes. "We got to go down again. Them guys needs us—and we can use them."

There was a shivering of the nearby brush. A bamboo spear fell short of

Anderson, taking the ground slantwise.

I got loose from a crawling vine. "Mind yourself," I cautioned.

"When they don't dare come nearer than that, we've got 'em buffaloed," said Anderson. He thrust a leg into the carpet of vines below him and started the scramble down toward hidden headhunters.

We got into deep jungle, gloomy but spotted with sunlight. We'd been going a short time when I saw Anderson lean forward and thrust his rifle before him. He fired. The smoke blew back in my face.

The jungle air jumped to the muzzle report. Then came the sharp but low musical sound of a blow gun discharged. We did not see a needle arrow—or feel one. A miss. Anderson fired again. I saw his shoulders jerk back from the recoil. He turned his head aside to spit. Again a blow gun loosed an arrow. Another miss. Anderson fired again.

We heard a squeal like a stuck pig. A hand was clapped over the open mouth of the squealer, shutting off the sound abruptly. Anderson fired at the squeal—and got another. For a minute there was a thrashing about in the vines ahead of us, then silence.

"This sure is my day for luck," whispered Anderson. "Wonder what time it is."

I glanced at my wrist watch, but before I could answer, Anderson fired. A cork popped out of a bottle—that would be a blow gun shot. A thorn arrow with a small cylinder of pith went into the blanket roll on Anderson's shoulder much as a butterfly might alight on a blossom—silently, with a gentle quivering of the pith as if eager to inject the deadly poison through broken human skin.

"Nearly got you that time," I remarked. "One of them in the right place would put wings on you."

"Near ain't good enough, but he may have better luck next time. Come on."

He crawled under the vines.

Soon we stumbled over a dead man, a youngster bleeding from a deep cut in his neck. The leaves about him were red. One hand was gripped to the mouth-end of a blow gun. A cross vine held his feet up. He had an ornamental strap across his forehead, a grass dilly bag to his waist cloth to carry our heads.

"It was him or us," said Anderson. "My tongue's stiff for the want of a smoke." He pushed on.

I stopped long enough to break the *sumpitan* over my knee. A crack was enough to put it out of business. Then I went on after Anderson.

DRUMS were talking slowly down in the valley. They were asking for information. Now and then a note higher than usual told the men after us that the white men must not be allowed to get away alive. As usual, the man who stays home to beat the drum is most ferocious.

We found nestlike places where hillmen had been stationed for several hours. They bent vines and bushes away from them out of the way for an arm swing with a spear or room to traverse the muzzle of a blow gun in any direction.

We had cut through the ring surrounding the prospectors. There must have been two parties of hillmen operating—one party pursuing us up to the pass over the mountain, and the other party after the prospectors.

We continued downward, scrambling over rocks which gave under our feet, and stopping to listen. It was a safe guess that we had little fighting to do in the next hour or so. The hillmen were in no hurry. We had to get down to the river or up the slope to the pass again, and either direction would have the jungle full of *sumpitan* arrows

aimed at us, along with an occasional poisoned spear to add variety.

Anderson slowed up presently and let me close on him. Then he lifted his head high as he dared and yelled. "Hay-*oo!* Where are you now?"

"Don't poke that rifle in my eye," answered a hoarse voice so close that both Anderson and I jumped a little. "Thought you was a nigger crawlin' in on us. Right this way, gents, to the barbecue."

Though Anderson and I had taken the morning's work lightly, we'd been under strain. I was sweating heavily between my shoulders. That is always a sign that I'm scared.

Anderson bent down, and I put my chin on his shoulder. We saw a lean sun-browned jaw with a week's reddish bristles of beard shot with white jutting through the leaves a few feet ahead of us. We picked up the fragrance of trade gin. Then we saw a wrinkled brow, a baldish head beyond, and a patch of gray hair.

We pushed into the hole that had been trampled and trimmed near the rock. The hastily cleared space was roofed by vines overhead hanging from the trees all about.

Two men were there—the bald little man in overalls who opened the way for us and another man leaned up against the rock, sitting on the ground, unrolling a bandage from a bare leg. There was an odor of liniment. We saw a canvas water bag that was dry, two rolled packs, the ashes of a small fire with a frying pan on it and a gunny sack with straps sewn on it for handles. This last was about half full, by its bulging sides. Bedding rolls, not all rolled up, had been used as seats near the fire. Ammunition belts, with no ammunition visible, and with holstered revolvers on them, lay near the bed rolls.

"My name's Akins," said the little man in overalls. "That old desert rat you see playin' hospital with hisself is named Huff. We was huntin' gold up in the Australian desert and didn't know when we was well off. You got a lot here, but it does take a lot of lead to keep healthy."

"How long you been on the island?" asked Anderson.

"What's today?"

"Friday—I guess."

"Then we been here ten days. We'd got along all right, but our guns run dry."

"Been shootin' at natives for ten days?"

"No. Only about four."

"What're you goin' to do now?"

"Mostly we want to get out alive."

"Get any gold?"

Akins twisted a shoulder toward the gunny sack. "Small mess—and a lot more where it come from. There was three of us when we come, but they got Smitty down by the river night before last. Shot a needle into him and he died quick. Then they got his head."

"How'd you get up the river?"

"In a canvas canoe. We unloaded the outfit off a tradin' schooner. Cap'n, he warned us these natives was bad. If it ain't too sassy to ask, what're you doin' here?"

"Trying to work up trade with the natives for the gold in their river. But the hillmen have got a grudge on us."

"They certainly are a grudgy lot. Don't seem to care about a river full of gold until somebody comes along who appreciates it, and then they want to blow pins into us. Huff, there, he got scratched with a spear in his laig, and it's botherin' him."

I walked over to Huff. He grinned up at me. A tall man, just skin and bone but made of wire, he looked a little older than Akins, and I found it hard to tell just how old that was.

"Did your leg turn blue—and swell?"

"It swelled, but it didn't turn blue, much. It makes my knee stiff." He had the bandage off now, and showed me a

slight cut in the calf of his leg below the knee. It didn't look very bad, but there was so much brown liniment on it that I could tell little about the scratch.

"When did you get it?"

"'Bout dusk last night."

"Then there wasn't much poison or you'd be dead. Since your knee stiffens, there was some poison in the spear but it may have been stale or weak. It's got to be fresh to be effective. What else did you do besides putting on liniment?"

"He drinked up our last quart of gin," said Akins. "And all at once. That's poison, too, so we set one agin the other. Don't worry about him—if he bit a rattlesnake, he'd kill the snake."

"The p'int of the spear didn't go in," explained Huff. "Hit me kind of kitterin', so-fashion. I razored the broke skin off right quick and let her bleed, then clapped this stuff on full stren'th." He pointed to the bottle of liniment.

"Don't get so excited up about yourself," said Akins with a grin. "It ain't manners to talk about yourself and your laigs. Wrop it up fancy and put your guns on or you won't never git a chance to be drunk again."

"You go jump in the river," said Huff. "This is my accident and I'll talk about it if I want to."

We found that we had only forty rounds of ammunition which fitted the prospectors' guns, although plenty for our own weapons, and as Anderson and I had a pair of heavy automatics each, besides our rifles, the four of us ought to shoot our way out of anything if we could find the targets.

"We had a canoe painted green so we could hide along the river," said Akins as he tied his holster ends to his thighs with rawhide. "They put four spears in the canoe. We worked on it two days with glue, fightin' 'em off all the time. That's how we lost Smitty, our other partner. That river's full of nuggets—look in that sack. We can all go down and pick a few up, now that we're set to handle things."

"We've got to get up through the pass and hit the beach. There'll be a trepang boat waitin' for us," said Anderson.

"You mean we ain't goin' back for more gold?" demanded Akins.

Anderson shook his head. "We'll have to take a layoff for about a month and let these hillmen cool off."

When we were ready to get on the hill trail Huff found that his wounded leg was stiffening at the knee and drawing up. Akins cut two saplings and threaded them through runlets sewn on each side of a canvas bed roll, turning it into a stretcher. The small ends of the saplings dragged from the straps over his shoulders and across his chest. By this means, once we got into the trail, he dragged Huff after him and had both hands free. With Huff facing behind, he was able to protect the rear of our little column.

We reached the pass at three o'clock, but before entering it, took time out to make sure no natives were hiding. The ground was fairly open due to volcanic cinders and lava. We got over the clear space between the peaks, but as we approached the covered part of the jungle trail on the lower side we met trouble.

Anderson was in the lead. Akins was ten feet behind, dragging the litter with Huff. I was abreast of the prospectors. A spear spouted from the brush to Anderson's left. He fired while it was still in the air.

From our right two spears came out of the green wall close to where the trail opened. They struck near Akins. He let bullets go from both hands.

"Plenty of 'em in there," said Anderson, as he fell back a little. "Mind a rush from the rear. There was too much breeze in the pass to blow gun us there,

and the distance too great. They let us through—to get us here."

I swung to cover our rear, along with Huff, who had both hands full of guns. "How do you feel?" I asked Huff.

"I'm calm as a kitten's eye."

"I mean, how's your leg?"

"Oh, that's shortenin' up on me all the time. I'd enjoy myself if I was to see somethin' to shoot at."

"Now then," said Anderson, "we've got to make that trail. Keep after me and keep lead going. Don't fire too fast. When we get to the brush we've got to be spittin' lead. I'll fire first, then all in turn, Akins after you and Huff after him—nice, regular and steady."

He fired as he advanced, we followed, moving slowly and peppering the jungle where the trail began on the far side of the pass. As the jungle there was a little below us, we could tell by the movements of the tops of the vines that the hillmen were giving way before us.

On that march, Anderson, though only a trader and pretending to no ability as a fighter, never flinched. Headlong he dove through that green tunnel, mile after mile, breaking trail for us. Time was endless. Akins trundled his partner along, sweating, swearing, stumbling and rising to go on, with only one thought in his brain—to get Huff to safety.

The jungle gloomed on us after a time. Then we were in blackness. Our luck was a heavy squall of rain. It battered the tops of the jungle and by fury of its noise covered our movement forward and downward. After the squall was over the jungle drummed with a steady downpour of dripping water. We floundered along, wet to our skins, cold and miserable and shivering.

The day passed.

ABOUT ten o'clock that night we struck a part of the trail which ran along the edge of a bench of land. We did not know that to our left there was a steep drop close to our feet. We could see nothing. But the left pole of the litter Akins dragged slipped over the edge of the bench.

That was when I first knew anything was wrong—Huff dumped out, crashed down through the vines below the rim of ground. It happened swiftly and without warning. There were no trees growing up the sheer wall, and the vines grew vertically up, seeking sunlight. So there were no cross vines to break Huff's fall. He fell all of thirty feet. If he had not sworn with vigor and efficiency as he went I might have unloaded my rifle into him.

"What the devil did you jump out for?" demanded Akins.

"You damned old horned toad!" yelled Huff from below. "Think I'm fallin' over clifts to improve my figger?"

Then we heard him trying to scramble up the vines. They tore away from the rocks, and hunks of lava caved away from the rim and tumbled down upon him. There is no necessity to make any record of his language.

"Don't try to climb up here," cautioned Anderson. "We'll get you from below—and hush up, or we'll have the hillmen down on us."

"How do you mean—below?" demanded Akins.

"The trail swings to the left and drops just a little ahead. I was just starting down when this happened. If we go on, we'll be down where he is and not far from him."

"Go ahead. I'll stick here," said Akins.

"You can't do any good here. He can't climb up. And don't you try to go down there to him, or we'll be in the soup proper."

Akins flashed a light downward. We made out Huff sprawled out over a mass of vines a few feet from the ground, trying to claw his way to a footing, like a gymnast fallen from a trapeze and at-

tempting to get off the net which had caught him.

"I can pull him up with a rope if I take the time to git the rope," said Akins.

"Put that light out!" commanded Anderson. "You're helpin' the hillmen to find us—and they may not be far away. They've tailed us down the hill, I'll bet."

"To hell with 'em," said Akins. "I want to git that partner of mine. He's all discomforted up with that leg of his, and it's worsenen." But he shut off the light. His teeth chattered with cold, for he was still wet through, and while we paused in our drive forward our soaking clothes bit through our flesh to our bones.

"Come on," said Anderson. "We'll get down the trail and work from lower ground."

"I ain't goin' to take no chances of losin' that old rummy. You go down, and when you're near him, I'll be along."

"But headhunters may be down on you."

"Let 'em. We been goin' it together twenty years. If they git him, they git me, too. You're boss, mister. But I know where he is now, and I'm stayin' —till hell freezes and the moon gets whiskers."

There was no use arguing. Splitting our party up was dangerous. Delay was more dangerous. The natives could force us down that precipice and we would be tangled in the vines with Huff like flies mired in sticky paper.

As I followed Anderson we heard Akins bawl down to Huk. "Lay still and keep that big mouth shut, Ed. If things go bad I'll fall down to where you be. And I got two drinks you didn't know about."

Before Anderson and I had gone ten yards the trail took the turn to the left and we dropped so sharply that we skidded down on our heels and our wet pants. There was a slime of mud over the stones and we were fifty feet down before we knew much about what was happening to us. It was like sliding off a steep roof through thick overhanging branches.

"Hay-*oo*, Huff!" called Anderson.

There was no answer. Huff should be from ten to fifty feet from us, back in the thick growth. He should have heard us easily. We lay there listening to the heavy dripping of rain from leaves all around us.

"Maybe he's fainted with pain," I said. "His strength was fairly well washed out of him—and he's an old man."

"Huff! Where are you?"

No answer. It seemed to me that there was a movement in the brush not far away. It was somebody crawling or something being dragged over vines. It wasn't easy to locate the noise because of the steady patter of falling water on the jungle brush.

"He's crawling to us," I told Anderson.

"Which way?"

I took hold of Anderson's arm and pointed with it to give him a bearing of the sound. We listened for a couple of minutes.

"If that's Huff, why don't he answer?" asked Anderson in a careful tone close to my ear. I felt his rifle being straightened out so it would be ready in front of him. We couldn't see. We might as well have been at the bottom of a sea of black ink.

"Akins!"

We got no answer.

"Huff!"

Not a sound.

"Well, dog gnaw my bones," said Anderson. "How do you account for that?"

"Only the devil can riddle you that. Either they're coming along the trail behind us and don't dare answer—or they're dead."

"How could they both be speared at the same time? One of 'em would yell, anyhow."

"Fix it your own way. Sounds reasonable."

"It ain't reasonable for us to stand here all night with the rain runnin' down our noses," agreed Anderson. "If the hillmen got 'em quick as that, they'll get us. We ain't got the chance of a frog leg in France."

"There's something just ahead of us."

"I don't hear anything."

"It isn't moving—it's standing still. Throw a light ahead while I put a sight that way."

I pressed my flashlight and the jungle blazed in front of us. A brown statue stood just a few yards from us, as immobile as if cast in bronze. There was a waist coat with a double row of pearl buttons down both vertical edges; a snakeskin strap across a forehead, holding the straight black hair close to the temples, a pair of eyes that caught the light, a double horizontal line of file-sharpened teeth in an open mouth, a hand head high, the arm bent and rigid, the point of a spear toward us and the far end of the shaft a trifle up-tilted.

My light must have blinded the spearman for a second. Then, with a swirl of jungle growth he was gone, just as Anderson fired.

My ears seemed to be blasted inward for an instant, for I was leaning over Anderson and was close above the rifle muzzle. My throat caught the bitter whiff of smoke. That air was heavy and the rifle discharge shook the jungle like a dynamite explosion. I snapped out the button and the jungle closed around us again like a black pit lined with black velvet.

We shifted our position and then lay still, listening. Rain ran down our backs under our shirt collars. We shivered, and not all from the cold either. My hair was up so straight it couldn't be parted with a wire brush.

"We might as well git speared goin' back to find Akins and Huff as making for the beach," said Anderson.

"They may be in a jam and don't dare speak," I greed. "We ought to be sure."

"Akins! Huff!"

The jungle shook to Anderson's bull-voiced roar. He was losing his natural patience.

All we heard was dripping water.

We got into the trail and fought our way up that hill of slippery mud. I climbed while Anderson listened, then I listened and Anderson climbed. Several times he fell back on me and we went down the hill together. Later Anderson estimated that we'd spend a thousand years in hell for what we said—and get a bargain.

At the top, we groped our way back trail. I fell over Akins's grub bag, which contained the frying pan and the collection of gold nuggets. My light revealed the canvas bed roll litter leaning up against the jungle wall just as it was when we left Akins.

"Not even any blood in sight," said Anderson. "No muss. Nothing wrong except that two armed white men, with mule-skinner lungs, just ain't no more. Considerin' that it's a hell of a job to go five feet either way out of this trail, unless you jump over this cliff, where did they go?"

I threw the light down into the hole Huff fell into. There was no sign of a man down there, white or brown. Neither of us had anything adequate to say.

The light off, I asked, "Ain't we about done around here?"

"Soon as I get all the mud out of my ears. I'll take this bag of gold along but we don't need a frying pan."

"Five to one you don't make the beach."

"I'll take that bet—if I lose try and collect."

We wasted little time from then on. Once more we slid down the muddy hill and bored down the trail for the beach. We fell over vines, our rifle barrels

snagged in them, but as it was all downhill going, we made good time.

We felt sure that the hillmen had abandoned pursuit. That was proved by the fact that we were not dead, always a good sign. We heard no drums. That lack of music proved that the heads of Akins and Huff had not reached the valley villages yet.

After the long agony of that black wetness, daylight began to strike in. At first, it was a mottled grayness in spots like specks floating before our weary eyes. Then the top of the jungle over us came alive with a shrilling of insects and a chirping of birds and an occasional rasping cry from a hornbill. The gray spots of light slowly yellowed, then reddened and the jungle began to steam with the heat of the lifting sun.

We were within a mile of the beach when Anderson stopped so we could have a rest and a smoke. He was haggard and hollow-eyed and his lips had a bluish tinge. We took off our shirts and wrung the water from them while a hornbill swore at us from above.

"They may be waiting for us to come out on the beach sand," said Anderson. "Or it may be they only wanted the two prospectors. We'll go along another half a mile or so, and if we don't see or hear anything, we'll cut through the brush and come out beyond that point of rocks where the palm trees are bunched. The trepang boat will be beyond that point. It may take us all day, but we've got to avoid coming out on the beach end of the trail."

"I'll waste a day in the jungle any old time to stay alive a few more years."

Anderson nodded. He put his blanket roll over his head. In that blanket he had the dozen heads we hoped to trade to the natives, but our business was ruined by the fact that Akins and Huff had the hillmen all hornetted up before we got down to the river.

We pushed on a quarter of a mile and entered an open glade. It was probably fifty yards long and ten wide. It had been burned over recently, either by accident or plan. There was only low brush in it. We entered that glade with caution. It was a perfect place for an ambush, for the hillmen could hide at the far end and spear us as we crossed.

We reached the far end without a hostile sound or a sight. But our throats were choked with a yellow dust from the blossoms of weeds. We stopped for a drink of water and lay back in the shade. Our throats were raw. We neither talked nor smoked. We were warm again and inclined to take our time for the rest of the trip.

Those weeds saved our lives. As we lay there quietly resting, I heard something in the glade behind me. I lifted my head to look.

A line of crouching brown men was advancing toward us, carrying spears or *sumpitans*. Their oiled bodies glinted in the sun. Only their heads and shoulders were visible across the tops of the weeds and second growth of brush.

That line moved forward slowly, thrusting through the underbrush without a sound except for the slight rustle my ears had picked up. I could see only the tightly drawn long black hair on the tops of their skulls.

I didn't take time to turn to Anderson. One word would have brought a shower of spears down upon us and a flight of dragon flies of tiny poisoned arrows. It was the way I drew my rifle barrel along with me as I turned that drew Anderson's attention. I heard him catch his breath in a hiss.

My first bullet got the man at about the center of the line. Anderson fired only a second after me. Before that whole line dropped from sight we got two men on each flank. It was quick shooting. But it was only sheer luck that we became an ambush for them. They believed as they advanced that we were deeper into the trail beyond them. They were only following us, and had no

scouts ahead, otherwise they would not have walked into the accidental trap.

When there were no more targets we held our fire. I turned to Anderson to see what he wanted next. His eyes were squinting over his sights to catch a possible quick shot.

"Fire two rounds," said Anderson. "Then you cut ahead of me and keep going. I'll be riding your tail. All we want is a check—and then we'll need leg room. Let 'em have it—now."

We fired, spacing our shots a little, to make it sound as if we intended to take our time about a lot more firing. Then I bolted down the trail and Anderson was after me.

He stopped occasionally to fire back up the trail, always catching up before he stopped to fire again. Then he hastily refilled his rifle magazine and kept closed up for a good stretch. The trail was getting more open. Daylight made flight easier.

In half an hour I spilled out into the hot sand of the beach. Anderson, puffing hard, was close behind as I turned to make sure he was there. He threw off his shoulder roll and drew a knife. Glancing over his shoulder, he began cutting the lashings of the blanket.

"You make for the rocky point," he gasped. "That's the only place we can hold 'em and not get surrounded. Don't mind me—get there—quick as you can—cover me as I follow you."

He knew I could outrun him. But I could not understand what he wanted to bother about cutting open the roll. It would have been simpler to throw it away, for it held nothing but our factory-made heads.

I legged for the beach where the water line would give me hard footing on the wet sand. The hill drums began to hum in the distance. If the trepang boat was not waiting beyond the point where it should be, Anderson and I could call it a day—or a couple of centuries. The hillmen were in a mop-up mood.

I did not reach the beach on that first spurt. I did not make straight for it, but ran at an angle which gained some distance for me toward the point. Before I made fifty yards something caught my eye—and every muscle in my body froze.

I was in an open space of sparse growth. There were several large ant hills in that space. Two of those mounds differed from the others. They were swarming with big ants. They were alike in patterns. Those ants formed the outlines of two gigantic men—arms outstretched, legs wide apart, no heads. At where the hands and feet of those gigantic human forms covered with ants should be, I saw stakes and split rattan vines used as thongs. Only for a frozen instant of horror did I wonder why the figures lacked heads.

They were not men; they were swarming, indescribable horrors.

Anderson was coming after me, but only in short dashes. I looked back and saw what he was doing. Every ten yards or so he dropped on the white sand one of the factory-made human heads.

"Why the hell don't you keep goin'?"

I pointed at the ant hills. My tongue choked me when I tried to tell Anderson the meaning of the ant-covered mounds.

At that instant a brown figure came charging out of the jungle just abreast of where we stood. My frozen muscles thawed. I threw up my rifle and fired. The brown man plunged forward into the sand and lay still.

"Keep goin'!" yelled Anderson. "That's a new gang up here that's set to cut us off from the point."

"Hurry along with me," I shouted. "The boat's out there. They'll hear us. They'll pick us up."

"Run!"

But I would not run. I wanted Anderson with me. The danger of his being cut off was too great. When he saw that I would not obey, he hurled the shoulder roll, and what heads it still contained, away from him.

He slipped his rifle sling from his shoulder and began firing at a party of natives to my left rear whom I had failed to see. These must have been the men who got Akins and Huff, took their heads, and brought the bodies to the beach to spreadeagle them over the ant hills. Then they laid in wait to get us when we stopped to look at the horror of the ant hills.

I joined fire with Anderson. He got to me. We fired as we ran along the beach. The party which followed us down through the trail could not resist the temptation to gather up the heads Anderson had strewn in the sand behind him and those left in the blanket roll. That delay made our escape possible.

"There go ten thousand dollars' worth of trade heads," mourned Anderson as we ran for the point.

"My own is worth more than that. We're ahead of the game."

"I'm not so sure of your value quoted," said Anderson. "Next time I tell you to run—you run!"

Offshore, the trepang lugger was drawing in, aroused by the firing and aflame with anxiety and suspense. They knew the headhunters. A boat dropped to the water and came flying for the beach. We were waist-deep, and still firing when the boat reached us and hauled us aboard.

Up in the hills the drums were beating a pean of triumph.

But they were mistaken. Our heads were safe.

With the next issue, ADVENTURE returns to the policy of publication under which it flourished to its highest point of prosperity and distinction. It will come to you hereafter twice-a-month. The next two issues will bear the dates of September 1st and 15th. The September 1st issue will be ready for you on the stands on August 15th. Then a little over two weeks later, on the first of the month, the extra issue will appear, the first in more than a year.

We have been working hard on the new program, and these are both splendid issues, living up to the great old ADVENTURE tradition to the fullest extent. Watch for the new ADVENTURE cover on your newsstand on August 15th!

STRONG BACK, WEAK MIND

A tale of the railroads—and the iron men who man them

By WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

IT'S AN old saying on the railroad and it probably comes down from that dim date in history when a bewhiskered gentleman tossed the first stick of firewood beneath the boiler of the original land-crawling kettle from which the locomotive has developed.

But two railroaders meet. One says, "What's your office, brother?"

The brother says, "Tallerpot," which is vernacular for fireman.

And the first one says, "Oh, strong back an' weak mind, eh?"

And there you have it. They say it about locomotive firemen today when, by the grace of God and steam-powered automatic stokers, the fireman sits up and rides like an intelligent person, and has time to wave at girls.

A fireman's back is sinewy and wide, and his neck is usually thick. If you'll listen to an engineer you'll think his skull is thick, too. An engineer will tell you that anybody with brains wouldn't be a fireman—wouldn't heave coal endlessly into the white-hot, pulsing maw of a working engine on the smoky end of a tonnage drag or the fancy-stepping advance of a Pullman train with his cheek against the furnace blast and the seat of his pants to the sky. An engineer will tell you a fireman is a pretty dizzy being, forgetting, of course, that before he became an engineer he had close association with a scoop.

Mike Cardigan was a locomotive fireman. He had a strong back. If Master Mechanic Wheeler was to be believed, Mike had no mind at all. It was the occasion of Mike's third attempt to pass the examination which would make him an engineer.

The master mechanic wrinkled his thin nose after the manner of one whose ol-

factory nerves are offended. He pointed to the sheaf of laboriously written examination answers on his desk. He said:

"You've been firing locomotives ten years," His tone was incredulous.

"Yes, sir," Mike said. "That is, mebbe I had thirty days off in all." He spoke quietly. He had entered this roundhouse office, a few moments ago, with hope. Now the hope was gone out of his eyes. He stood tight-lipped, waiting.

"Damned hard to believe," Wheeler said. He thumped the papers. "Ten years! These papers look like a sixth grade pupil might've done them."

Mike glanced at the fruit of his effort. The back of his neck was suddenly red. There was a tremor in his tone when he said more sharply, "If you're meanin' I ain't got them answers accordin' to the book—"

"Just that," Wheeler retorted. He waved a slim hand. "In the old days you could've got by, Cardigan. Fire a few years, learn how to start and stop, guess your speed. Education enough to sign a train order and read the time table. That was in the old days. You've got to have more in this age of mechanical precision and application of intellectual to mechanical problems. So—"

"But I can tell you," Mike cut in with feverish haste, holding up a wide hand with black circles at the blunt nails, "things, lots a things about runnin' an engine—"

"If you could," Wheeler broke in coldly, "these papers would show it." There was something utterly final about Wheeler's tone.

Mike's fists knotted at his sides as his frame stiffened in sudden recoil. His mouth opened, his tongue slid over his dry lips.

"There's no excuse for it," the master mechanic continued. "When you failed the first time, and Vernon Kadell, who is younger on the seniority list than you, passed around you, I went to the trouble of having his examination answers typed so you could study them and see how he handled them."

Mike swallowed hard. The mention of Kadell pained him, but the mention of Kadell's model answers on the art of locomotive running turned his stomach over. He returned the master mechanic's glare.

"Did it do you any good?" Wheeler demanded. "You failed the second time. Couldn't write intelligent answers. I warned you you'd get one more chance. You got it. You know the answer now. Good fireman, Cardigan. Too bad you couldn't learn enough about a locomotive in ten years to pass the test for promotion."

"But," Mike protested with the vehemence of desperation, "there ain't a question I can't answer if you'll only—"

"Here's a whole list of 'em," Wheeler retorted, indicating the papers. "If you knew as much about an engine as Vernon Kadell. . . ."

VERNON KADELL was, in the eyes of the master mechanic, a young man who would go far because he was always a half dozen thoughts ahead of his job. Mr. Kadell ran to length and carried himself with a swaggering, arrogant assurance. He had a long nose and a long jaw, and straight lips that smiled thinly. Furthermore, he was agreeable—with his bosses. He could say yes readily, and just at the right time. He was observant. He kept his eyes open. When he saw things he knew would not fit Mr. Wheeler's idea of efficiency and economy, he told Mr. Wheeler about it.

For instance: An outlying engine house machinist, in Kadell's estimation, had more rod brasses on hand than efficiency and economy seemed to require. Kadell made a note and a re-

port. The poor machinist suffered a reprimand and was bewildered by a flock of demerit marks. Again: A flagman was lavish in his use of fusees. Kadell thought flagging could be done on less. The flagman found himself suddenly before the train master answering questions and being no end embarrassed. So Kadell was popular with the main line men—like a snake. He was, to Mike Cardigan, a large and throbbing pain in the divers parts of the anatomy.

And as for real steam-blown, grease-encrusted engine running ability—Well, it was too bad the old timers couldn't have their say, the old timers like Steager, Russell and Kemp, fearless engine runners proven by the long test of time. They could tell Wheeler that this thick-necked Cardigan was a "natural"; could railroad rings around the well-schooled Mr. Kadell any day in the week. They as old hogheads who had seen firemen come and go, could tell Wheeler that Mike took to a locomotive like a piston takes to steam. They could testify that Mike Cardigan could have been called in to run engines years ago. They would readily have told Mr. Wheeler that, when it came down to real engine sense, Mike made Kadell look like a rookie. Unfortunately, Mr. Wheeler was not the type to consult the old timers. Mr. Wheeler was of the new school—the copy book school and if you didn't have book learning. . . .

Mike didn't have it and he knew it. It was too late now to do anything about it. While Vern Kadell had had the advantage of Manual Training High, Mike had been wiping engines in the Delphi roundhouse to help feed a large and hungry tribe of Cardigans. Mike was thirty, and so was Kadell. Mike had preceded him on the firemen's roster, but now, as far as Mike could see, his seniority meant nothing. All those back-breaking years meant nothing. He stood condemned to scoop coal the rest of his life unless he got a new master mechanic, or a miracle happened. Wheeler was young and healthy and Mike didn't believe in miracles.

Moving across the outbound spur at the roundhouse in the deepening shadows, Mike looked up at the looming hulk of a long-barrel locomotive with pain in his eyes. He saw the shiny handle of the throttle bar and winced. He had started firing so that he might pull a throttle in due course. That was every fireman's natural ambition. But promotion to the right-hand side had held out to Mike something more than gratification of a personal ambition. Engine running pay meant an opportunity for those younger, hard-eating Cardigans to get a lot of things in youth that Mike hadn't got. Mike folded his fists, rested them on his hips, spat into the cinders and shook his head in a gesture of hopelessness.

It was here that the freckled engine caller found him. The caller had a lantern in the crook of his arm, and his cap beak projected over his rear collar button. He came up breathlessly, shouting,

"Where the hell've you been? Lookin' all over fer yuh. Can yuh make a call for 7:15 outta the house?"

Mike blinked against the persistent moisture behind his lashes. "Seven-fifteen?" He looked at his watch and kept his eyes down. It was six-thirty. He was entitled to an hour and a half notice. "Hunh! Short call."

"It ain't my fault," the youth retorted. "Can yuh, or can't yuh?" He stamped about impatiently. "It's a extra east, an' is it hot!"

"Silk?" Mike asked, looking up. There was nothing faster on wheels.

"Eatin' beef," the caller snapped. "On the hoof. Sixty cars. The super's got a personal interest in it somehow. He's over at the depot walkin' up an' down, an' lookin' at his watch, an' talkin' to himself. How about it?"

Mike took the book, and the caller held the lantern over it while Mike

poised the blunt pencil. He had half finished the letter M in his name when he stopped suddenly, scowled at the name scrawled above the space for his own. His gaze hardened. He faced the caller.

"What's this?" Mike gestured at the page. "What's Kadell doin' signed up with Josh Kemp's engine?"

"Josh laid off," the caller said. " 'Saft-ernoon. Three days. Kadell, bein' first out on the extra board. . . . Yuh ain't afraid to ride with Kadell, are yuh?"

For one quick moment the temptation was strong in Mike's mind to tell the caller to get an extra fireman, too. He looked about in the dark, and saw red. Kadell, on the right-hand side of the engine that should, this night, be his!

"Are yuh goin'?" the caller demanded, "Or are yuh layin' down? I ain't got all night."

Laying down? Yes, there'd be several who'd think that, right off, if Mike refused to go. Mike glared at the freckled kid whose pinched face seemed eager and pale in the glow of the yellow lantern. Then, swallowing against the hot tightness in his throat, he calmly, deliberatedly, signed his name.

OLD MOAKES, the super, as the caller had intimated, actually was walking up and down. But he was not talking to himself. Not when Mike Cardigan got in on the conversation. Old Moakes was addressing Master Mechanic Wheeler on the Delphi depot platform right under the left-hand cab window of Engine 3038. The engine rested in the passenger station spur, waiting for the sixty cars of eatin' beef to slide into town. Mike rested in the window, getting an ear full.

"Looka here, Wheeler! Is this danged engine all right?" Old Moakes gestured toward the drivers of Mike's mountain-type road hog.

"It's Josh Kemp's regular engine," Wheeler returned precisely. "If it isn't all right—"

"It better, by hell, be perfect," Old Moakes snorted. "Get the crew."

Wheeler assembled Engineman Kadell and Fireman Cardigan. Kadell had been on the opposite side of the engine with his oiler and torch. The flickering light of the torch accentuated the length of nose and jaw beneath his long cap beak. The conductor and two brakemen panted up. The super bunched them before him.

Old Moakes addressed Kadell, "Looka here, Kadell! You been all over that jack?"

Kadell looked over his shoulder at the engine. "Yes, sir," with assurance.

"Looka!" Old Moakes bawled. "The whole pack of you. You're rollin' outta here on fast orders, passenger train time with sixty cars behind you, an' the reason is there's around a thousand head of blooded cattle in them cars that've got to make Belvedere by eleven o'clock or we're sunk."

"Somebody wantin' their beef quick," the conductor said.

Old Moakes glared at the skipper. "Them cattle's been in transit damn near thirty-two hours. The law gives us thirty six, an' then we gotta unload 'em for feed water an' rest. You hyennas know that, an' you also know there ain't a damn place where we can do that outside of Belvedere unless we use the prairies."

Mike tensed. He caught, as they all did, the urgency of the occasion. You couldn't exceed that time limit law without letting yourself in for fines, and penalties, to say nothing of loss claims filed by the shippers.

"Another thing," Old Moakes snapped. "Them cattle's new business. We fought like hell to get it. Tried to make a fast showin' with it, an' what happens?" He turned a wrathful eye on the master mechanic. "An engine failure on the west end lays it out six hours. Engine failure. But from here on, by hell, we

wheel it, an' I'm givin' you the railroad to do it on. Nothin' in your way. So if there's any engine failures—"

He left his words up in the air. He swung about, walked ponderously over to the giant engine and glared up at it. Mike looked sidewise at Kadell. Kadell's lips were tight and bloodless. He strode over to the ponderous drivers and poked his oil can at a hole. Mike saw the hand tremble, the spout miss the mark.

A headlight suddenly lit up the west, a long eerie blast sounded. The west end crew boiled down on the platform with the sixty cars.

Old Moakes yelled, "You put her head in the air, Kadell. You make the time. An' I'm ridin' the caboose to *see* that you guys make it." He swung about and walked with the conductor toward the rear while, suddenly about the stilled wheel line of the train, lights sprang into action as car tonks swarmed over it. The cattle, hungry and tired from the long grind, bawled lustily, stamped impatient hoofs in the crowded cars.

THAT Engineman Kadell was nervous, Mike Cardigan was well aware. Not that Mike held it against him. Anybody would be nervous with sixty cars on his tail, the superintendent aboard, and three hours and forty-five minutes in which to make one hundred and sixty miles—anybody that is, but the division's boy-wonder who certainly was taking pains to hide his nervousness.

There were the usual rites. Watches compared, orders read and checked, signals observed and time table inspected. Kadell moved with the swagger of nonchalance, but he fumbled at his watch chain and continually looked at various gauges. Finally, Mike saw the skipper's lantern go high and whirl. He turned to give Kadell the signal that all was well. Kadell was on the deck, inspecting Mike's fire.

Kadell straightened and said officially, "A little light in the corners, Cardigan. Better slug—"

"The skipper's breakin' his arm wavin' a highball back there," Mike cut in with a hard set to his jaw. He got to the deck and glared at his mate.

Kadell reached for the whistle cord, fumbled when he pulled it, sent out a weak toot. Viciously he jerked the cord twice, answered the sign to go.

Mike saw the engineman drop to his seat, ease the throttle open. Mike continued to glare at him with red spots under the tan of his weathered cheeks. Engineers simply didn't tell firemen of ten years standing, just how light or how heavy the fire should be.

The two blasts from the whistle being the signal that each member of the crew sit down except the gentleman with the strong back and weak mind, Mike planted his feet far apart, gripped his scoop handle and turned the seat of his pants to heaven. This engine not being equipped with the automatic stoker, Mike would strike this pose hereafter for forty-eight out of every sixty minutes on the run. His shoulders moved, his torso pivoted at the waist and he swung his laden scoop. His left foot touched the trip pedal expertly, the butterfly doors slammed apart, the scoop banged against the rim, the coal sprayed over the grates and the evening performance was officially begun.

Mike was looking at his fire over the heel of his scoop to determine the policy he would immediately pursue when suddenly he saw half his fire leave the grates to go out the stack. The engine deck danced giddily beneath his feet. The furnace seemed to backfire and he got his head away from the firedoor just in time to save his eyebrows and his flesh.

The engine's drivers were in a spin. Mike flashed a look at the engineer. Kadell was shoving the throttle shut.

Kadell was on his feet, jamming the bar with a vicious thrust.

Mike wanted to yell, "Why the hell don't you tear it out by the roots an' throw it away?" He thought of his crippled fire and clenched his fingers over his scoop handle. On a wet rail there might be an excuse for a start like that. Kadell was mumbling to himself.

Hot under the collar, Mike struck his best professional pose and prepared to shovel coal. He got one scoop in, got the door open, and had another load on the way when the fire, for the second time, blew back at him and the white-hot coals danced loosely on the grates while the draft caused by the slipping drivers, sucked holes in the bed. He hurled the laden scoop to the floor and stood up, letting the doors slam shut.

Kadell didn't face him. Kadell was busy with that throttle, plunging it shut. Mike stood and watched with his hands on his hips. The needle on the steam gauge quivered. Mike wondered what Wheeler would say if he could see his boy wonder getting sixty cars under way so beautifully. Certainly Wheeler could hear if he still was back there on the platform.

The drivers finally caught, the cattle rocked into steadier motion. Kadell, shooting a quick glance at the steam gauge, yelled, "Fog!" He was calling for steam.

Mike grinned at him, but it wasn't a pleasant, friendly grin. Mike went over to Kadell and yelled at him above the engine noises, "You handle this jack like you just started out, big feller, an' you can fire her yourself."

And having thus delivered himself, Mike expertly shoveled coal for the next fifteen minutes without so much as a pause. Smoke curled from the left leg of his old overalls, and the smell of scorching leather from the glove on his left hand was pungent in his nostrils. He covered the bright spots, spread the fine coal in a glittering spray of the white heat. He slugged the black dirt against the flue sheet, banked it heavily in the near corners and under the fire door where a yellowish, sulphurous smoke curled from it.

At length Mike stood up, stretched his back, listened with expert ear. The exhaust was a sure, drumming roll in the sawed-off stack—the vast, fierce roll of unharnessed power. The needle on the gauge held hard at 225 pounds. The rods and drivers were a gleaming blur. She purred along like a sleek cat, eating up the dizzy miles.

She was also taking a beating. Unless Mike was completely cockeyed, Mr. Kadell, in his great concern over the responsibility of making the time and getting those cows to Belvedere, had forgotten all his book knowledge of efficient engine running. He was putting the 3038 through paces designed to tear her apart before she ever reached her goal. He was also, knowingly or otherwise, doing his level best to break his weak-minded fireman's strong back.

They stopped for coal and water eventually and when Mike looked at the tender, his knees seemed suddenly weak beneath his bulk. Josh Kemp, his regular hogger, wouldn't have used that much coal in half again the miles with twice the train. If you called this kind of engine running obtaining maximum efficiency through application of intellect—

Mike couldn't remember just how Master Mechanic Wheeler had stated it, that line about intellect and making an engine stand on her hind wheels and eat out of your hands. The signal had come to proceed, coal and water having been taken aboard, and Mike was staring across the cab when he observed Mr. Kadell having trouble with the throttle again. It looked, in fact, as if the engineman couldn't get it open. From the way he'd been handling it since the very start, Mike thought, it was a wonder he had any throttle at all.

Mike had it in his mouth to say, "Why don't you take a hammer to it," when Kadell finally yanked it back, throwing all his length and weight into the effort. Steam roared through the cylinders, the train jerked ahead, and Mike hoped that everybody in the caboose had been sitting down. If they hadn't, they'd be lying on the floor now. The grade was in favor of the train which is all that saved Mike a repetition of a torn-up fire. Mike looked back and saw the conductor stab at the middle of the train and get on. He could imagine what the conductor might now be saying.

JUST where the rain started, Mike didn't know. He was first conscious of it on the climb to Brandonville which was between 9:18 and 9:25. The grade was long and tough, the ruling maximum being one per cent. Kadell had been working the engine down in the far corner which, according to Mike's way of thinking, was plenty dumb, but Mike hadn't complained. He had just gone on ladling in coal. His back was wet, and his overalls clung against the front of his legs. He paused for a moment to lean out the gangway, suck in air. The rain hit him, refreshed him while it streaked his grim visage.

Turning back to the gauge, he saw the needle quivering. He was getting more tired by the second, and his temper was getting shorter. He had just bent over to take up his scoop again when a familiar whine sounded from the engineer's side. The whine was the right-hand injector. Kadell had started pumping a stream of cold water into the boiler. That, in any fireman's language, was the last straw.

Mike threw his scoop to the deck, planted his feet at Kadell's side and without so much as a word, reached over the engineer's arms, gripped the injector valve handle and slammed it shut, cutting off the water flow.

Kadell, instantly, was on his feet, his face shoved down in Mike's.

"Just what's the big idea, Cardigan?" the engineman hurled fiercely. "There's been firemen dismissed for less than that."

"An' there's been engineers killed for it, too," Mike retorted. "I only got one back an' one pair of hands." He held those hands under Kadell's long nose. "If you know how to run this engine, you run it, by God. I'll watch the water. You pull that injector of yours on again, an' I'll take a wrench an' smash it." He turned his back.

Kadell shouted, "What do you think Mr. Wheeler'll say to this, or Mr. Moakes if I took a notion to report it?"

"I don't give a damn, an' you'll report it. I ain't worried about that none. You'll report it an' tomorrow I'll be on the carpet answerin' questions. Leave that to you. What I'm sayin' is, I'm firin' this engine as long as I can stand up. You touch the water just once more. . . ."

Mike went to firing. Kadell kept his hands off the injector. And after what seemed an eternity of sweat and backbreak, they straightened out on level track.

It was evident that Kadell was plenty sore. When he blew for Brandonville, Mike thought he would blow the roof off the dome. When he adjusted his lever for a level pace, Mike thought the jerk on the bar would strip the valve gear from both sides. When Kadell, starting down the long grade east of Brandonville, closed the throttle to drift, Mike feared he would shove it clear through the back head of the boiler. Obviously, Kadell was thinking up things to tell.

By the same token, Mike Cardigan was thinking up things to say in his defense. He was resting his strong back in his weak-minded way, and contemplating on what a wonderful thing it must be to have book learning and

brains. He sat sprawled on his cushion with his eyes on the back of the head brakeman's neck. The brakeman was dozing on the seat ahead of his. The engine was still drifting with closed throttle, giving him a life-saving respite.

Another hour and a few minutes, and it would be over, Mike thought. Then he could lay down his scoop. It might be for the last time if Kadell talked hard enough.

EVERYTHING didn't go well. Fireman Mike Cardigan was not aware that anything had happened, however, until he was roused from his lethargy by the sudden blare of exhaust air through the brake valve chamber in the cab. His ear told him without looking at valve or gauge that Kadell had thrown her into a heavy service reduction—almost an emergency application.

Looking across the cab, Mike saw the engineer with his head far out the window. Mike looked out. There was nothing ahead. He looked again at Kadell. Kadell, on his knees on his seat cushion, gave a good rear end view of a gentleman much agitated.

Being a first class fireman, Mike asked no questions. He just sat to take advantage of all the rest he could get. Whatever it was probably was pretty bad. He'd know about it soon enough. If there was something that would require outside labor in this nice rain . . . well, the beating Kadell had been giving Josh Kemp's pride and joy, it certainly was a wonder it had held together this far.

At thought of the beating, Mike's fists clenched. This engine was his engine, too. He had been firing regularly for Josh for a good long time. He knew this engine like he knew his brothers. Every little wrinkle about her. Still, why get sore? It wasn't his responsibility. He didn't have book learning, so there was the end of it. He tried to compose himself. They slid to a stop.

Kadell ignited his torch at the fire door, went through the forward window of the cab to the running board alongside the boiler. He was gone a long time. Once Mike peered out and saw him looming grimly in the flare of the torch with the rain streaking his face. Kadell was standing at the steam dome.

It was a hard-faced Kadell who came back in from the rain with his cap soaked and his mouth drawn. He extinguished the torch and turned to Mike.

"Kill your fire!" Kadell delivered the order tersely. He wiped his hands on a piece of cotton waste, looked down at them steadily.

Mike's head went forward on his thick neck. He asked a weak-minded question. "What the hell?"

"Kill the fire," Kadell retorted. Then, yelling to the brakeman, who now stared at him wide-eyed, "Go back an' tell the super an' the skipper we've got to be towed in. Throttle valve's broken in the shut off position. Either it's a tow-in, or we stay here and cool her down enough to fix her."

Mike stiffened. He took a step forward. Through the soft drumming of the rain came the bawling of the hungry, ride-weary cattle. The brakeman was getting his rubber coat buttoned on. Now he was reaching for his lantern.

Mike's hand caught the brakeman's sleeve. He faced Kadell. All animosity was forgotten as it always is among true rail hands when it's necessary to band together to face an emergency. Mike was conscious only of sixty cars of costly cattle. Sixty cars of crying, living things. Business that had to be moved. Short time . . . an hour and a little over with forty-odd miles to travel.

Mike said to the brakeman, "Wait." He addressed Kadell—"Broke shut?"

"You heard me." Kadell was chewing on his nerves. He was in a spot. His eyes were slits and a chill light glowed

behind them. "That valve's disconnected inside the dome. I can't open—"

"The hell you can't," Mike shot. "We can blow—"

"I said you kill your fire," Kadell barked. "By God, I'm still the engineer here." To the trainman, "Get going, feller. Go tell the skipper."

"No!" Mike whirled on the engineer. There was no thought of mutiny in his mind, no thought of anything but doing a piece of engine running that would enable this crew to accomplish what it had started out to do, and what it was under orders to do.

Kadell's long nose was suddenly down in Mike's face and Kadell's eyes flamed unpleasantly close to him. Kadell said, "You kill that fire or. . . ."

The engineer thrust the heavy shaker bar at Mike and the fireman staggered back a pace under the fierce impact. One end of the bar scraped a shin, shot pain up through his side. In a sudden burst of heat, he hurled the bar from him, heard it clatter on the steel gangway apron.

Mike fixed Kadell with a glare that was half hurt and half anger. His lips curled. He turned away. He said, "If that's the way you take it when a guy wants to do you a favor, kill your own damn fire."

Kadell reached out and caught Mike's shoulders. He attempted to spin the fireman around. Mike lost his balance, stumbled over the shaker bar and crashed his elbow against the boiler. He started a swing with a hard fist.

"Wait'll I sit me down so's I can watch the fight proper!"

That shout stopped the fist in its thrust. It was from Old Moakes. The super slid down on the coal with the conductor at his heels. The super didn't sit, but came between engineman and fireman with his iron jaw thrust out.

"Somebody tell me," Old Moakes cried. "Somebody tell me, quick!"

Engineman Kadell told plenty. "Plain mutiny," Kadell finished. "That fireman knows we can't move a wheel."

Old Moakes turned to Mike and then to the brakeman. The brakeman spoke up in testimony. The brakeman blurted, "That's what started the rumpus, Mr. Moakes. Mike, he knows somethin' that'll start us off, but Kadell won't listen."

Old Moakes glared at Mike and said, "All right! You talk!"

"It's—it's matter of blowin' open—"

"What he wants to do is cripple us for good," Kadell cut in, stopping Mike. "What he wants to do is take a chance on wrecking the whole engine."

"I'm listenin'," Moakes bawled. He looked at his watch impatiently.

"It ain't takin' a chance," Mike cried defiantly. "Not if you know how. It ain't in the copy books to do when you got a throttle broke in the shut off position. It—"

"I tell you," Kadell stormed, "he'll blow the covers off the steam chests. He'll fix this engine so it can't ever be started."

Old Moakes turned to Mike with smoky eyes glowing. "We sure as hell ain't goin' anywhere very fast now." He kept playing with his watch. "How about the steam chest covers, Mike?"

"No, sir," Mike said stoutly. "They won't blow, sir. I know—"

"We'll take a chance, Mike," Old Moakes bawled. "You do your stuff if you're positive. You get up there in Kadell's place, since he's so squeamish."

"But—but I ain't qualified," Mike said. "Wheeler. He turned me down today. Third time. I ain't supposed to handle an engine—"

"You'll get us outta here, or I'll kick you off the railroad," Old Moakes stormed. "Can you hear them cattle bawlin'? Move."

Mike moved. He called in the flagman, got the lantern signal from the rear. The train was still on the long, descending grade. That was what he

needed to accomplish his purpose. A good, fast roll. He released the air with a professional twist of the brake handle. The wheels, free of the shoes, turned over. The momentum increased and Mike set himself to do what the copy books said should never be done in a case of this kind.

Without the least sense of doing the unusual, without the slightest show of drama, Mike pulled the throttle bar far back and latched it. He was fully conscious that from here on everything depended on timing, on his sense of feel and hearing. And yet there was no tremor through him, no doubt, no fear.

He crouched on the arm rest, forgot Moakes and Wheeler and Kadell. He attuned his senses to speed, drift and pound. He opened his cylinder cocks wide.

The free-rolling cattle was near the bottom of the grade when Mike acted. Timing everything to a degree, he came up on one knee on his seat, grasped the reverse lever firmly, yanked it over into backward motion.

Immediately the pistons, lunging in the cylinders, became two powerful compressors, pumping air up through the steam chests, into the branch pipes and then into the dry pipe to center its force against the closed seat of the throttle valve.

One brief mistake in timing, one false move, and even more than the steam chest covers would go. But Mike paid no heed to this. He was waiting alertly for that precise moment when the throttle valve would be blown wide open, when the exhaust would roar through the stack, when the steam would hiss from the open cylinder cocks. He would feel all this before he would hear it.

Just when he felt it no man in that cab could say, nor could any determine the infinitesmal fraction of a second between the feel and the sound those in the cab heard. They who watched only knew that, very suddenly, they saw Mike Cardigan heave his lever into forward motion again, and almost—but not quite—simultaneously came the roar from the stack that indicated the successful completion of the job.

It all came with vast suddenness and terrific thunder and then Mike was getting from the seat a little flushed, his eyes exultant. Of course, the throttle couldn't be closed. From now on the reverse lever would have to be used for any starting and stopping necessary. Kadell would know how to do that. Mike wasn't sure what the books said about such handling, but he knew that all Kadell had to do was leave his cylinder cocks open and ease the engine in and out of gear by the position of the lever.

The sweat gleamed on Mike's grimy face as he looked at Kadell. They both looked at Moakes. The cattle streaked through the rainy dark. Forty miles to go, an hour to do it. A clear rail, a wide open throttle.

The train highballed out on the flat at the bottom of the hill. Old Moakes turned to Kadell, glared at him a moment, nodded to the right-hand seat. Kadell crawled up behind the throttle, stuck his set face into the night and the wet.

Mike recovered his scoop, poised himself. Then he straightened and faced Old Moakes. He felt foolish. He looked at his hands and said, "If you got to say anything to Mr. Wheeler about me rearin' up on my hind legs like I did, well, I'm sorry I shot off my mouth, I guess. Only I—"

"Looka that steam gauge," Old Moakes bawled. He indicated the needle with a blunt hand. "If you don't get coal under that boiler, an' build up a fire, you're gonna have to tell somebody plenty."

IT WAS on the morning of the third day after Old Moakes had spoken to Master Mechanic Wheeler in no uncer-

tain terms. Mike Cardigan was standing under the long boiler of a 3000 class road hog in the outbound spur at Delphi. He was poking the long copper snout of his oil can into a small round hole. He turned slowly at the sound of footsteps behind him. He saw a large, eager-faced youth in bright new overalls, looking at him expectantly.

"I'm looking for Engineer Cardigan," the youth said. "You him?"

"I'm him," Mike answered. He set his cap at a more rakish angle.

"My name's Duffus. Mr. Wheeler sent me—"

"Duffus? What's your office, brother?"

"Fireman," Mr. Duffus said modestly. "Mr. Wheeler said if I made a few trips on your engine—"

"Strong back an' weak mind, eh?" Mike poked at another hole with his oil can. A half smile played around his lips.

"What's that?" Duffus asked abruptly.

"Pass it," Mike said. "Climb aboard an' introduce yourself to the tallerpot."

He heard the youth walk away and climb the gangway steps. He watched him and mumbled under his breath, "Too bad. Looks like he had brains, too. Well, if a guy wants to start out in life that way. . . ."

Engineman Mike Cardigan, freshly promoted to the right-hand side, thought briefly of all the young, hard-eating Cardigans and the chances they'd get now, and the fact that they'd never have to monkey around with railroads. He poked his oil can into another hole.

That Whistling Son of a Gun

J. B. LEFFINGWELL and R. H. STOWELL

I SEE by the papers," began the old tropical tramp, "that whistling shows an inferiority complex — at least, some durn fool professor says so."

We were settled comfortably in easy chairs on the veranda of his palm-thatched bungalow. The afternoon breeze rustled the palm leaves; a parrot scolded softly from its perch on a suspended barrel hoop; among the blossoms of the Martinique vine that nearly covered the house a hummingbird darted swiftly in and out. Below us the turquoise of Sigunea Bay stretched on and on toward the dim outline of Cabo Frances.

"Yep," he presently continued, "the feller that made that remark was either a durn fool or seeking cheap publicity. 'Cause in my experience a whistling man is one who don't give a damn."

Here he paused to eye my long, paper-covered parcel hopefully.

"Moreover, sir, pleasantly refreshed by some mild and agreeable beverage, I could narrate you an incident that would properly illustrate my point.

"Back in 1917," he resumed, after the bottle of Bacardi has been unwrapped and our *copitas* filled and downed to the grand old Spanish toast of "health and money," "I was *adminstrador* of a big sugar cane *colonia* down Oriente Province way. The World War was going on. Menocal, the President, had just declared war against the Central Powers; Ex-President Joe Mike Gomez, leader of the liberals. or opposition

party, was being urged by German agents to start a revolution.

"In July, August, or thereabouts, General Gomez kicks over the traces and leads his following into the *manigua*—which is a Cuban way of saying 'takes to the woods' or 'starts a revolution'—which move, to say the least, is most embarrassing to both the Cuban government and Uncle Sam.

"Yep, things was sure in a terrible mess—" the old tropical tramp gazed mournfully at his empty *copita* as if its arid condition was directly responsible for the discouraging trend of his story—"and President Menocal couldn't count on the army as a whole, 'cause most of the officers, having been appointed by Gomez during his term, naturally belonged to his party, and the buck soldiers, as usual, had divers and sundry opinions, which didn't clarify the situation none.

"In the immediate vicinity of my plantation there was two army outfits doing tactical maneuvers—that is, they was showing the *pueblo* that the government had the situation in hand. One was an infantry company commanded by a feller we will call Lieutenant Gonzalez—a dark complected little runt, but a soldier every inch of him; politically a conservative and naturally loyal to the constituted government. The other outfit was a machine gun company skippered by a Lieutenant Sanchez—a tall, cadaverous cuss with a shifty eye and a persuading tongue; a political appointee of Ex-President Gomez's and therefore a liberal and a revolutionist.

"Well, to get to the meat in the cocoanut, this Lieutenant Gonzalez weren't no *bobo* by a long shot. He figured that his brother officer, Sanchez, although he had many loyal troops in his outfit, was going to join up with the rebels. Not only that, he knew that there must be a great many liberals in his own company who would swap over at the first opportunity. So, taking it all and all, he figured that him and Sanchez had better get together and divide up the forces according to their political beliefs in a gentlemanly and amicable manner.

"He figures for awhile, and then sends a soldier with a message to Sanchez, who is camped in a nearby village called Dos Pozoz, suggesting a meeting place and naming my *finca*, La Esperanza, as a good place.

"Sanchez agrees to the proposition, and the next morning about coffee time I was greeted by the advance guards of the opposing factions, which was soon followed by the main bodies of troops.

"They marches on to my *batey* and forms in lines facing each other; the two officers consult a few minutes very polite and dignified, and then Gonzalez, getting the first chance, goes out between the two companies and orates to them, calling on them as loyal soldiers of the republic to remain true to the constituted government as represented by their president, General Mario Menocal.

"Next Lieutenant Sanchez harangues them, making fun of Menocal, saying that he was a creature of Uncle Sam's, and, last but not least, assured them that 'looting was going to be good.'

"This last assurance seems to mean a lot to the soldiers, 'cause when they marks out two lines and tells the men to fall in according to their beliefs and opinions, as soon as noses was counted it developed that Sanchez has about two-thirds and Gonzalez one-third of the total forces. Not only that, but being the larger force and believing, like Napoleon, that God was on the side of the heaviest artillery, the rebels retained all the four Colt machine guns, Sanchez absolutely refusing to give Gonzalez even one gun—which move put the latter in rather an embarrassing position.

"At the windup of the proceedings both sides agrees not to start hostilities till noon the next day, and Sanchez marches off with about a hundred and fifty men, the machine guns and all the

spare ammunition, as well as the quartermaster's supplies.

"As soon as the coast was clear I asks Gonzalez what he is going to do.

" 'Lieutenant,' I says, 'it seems to me that you are right in one hell of a fix.'

" 'Not so bad as it seems," he answers. 'First, I want the loan of a horse to send a courier to Palma Soriano to notify headquarters of the situation and to bring reenforcements; next I am going to fortify your house. It is made of concrete and will make an excellent strong point.'

"Naturally I protest vigorously, both the loan of the horse which I know I will never see again, and the turning of my house into a fort. But it ain't no use. The lieutenant is adamant. Further, he advises me to take to the woods until the row is over, because there is going to be some nasty fighting and I might get hit. But seeing as how I has some valuable property in the house that I wants to protect, and seeing that I also has a natural desire to get in any game where fighting is, I refuses, and tells him that I'll stick around . . ."

"NOW, sir, don't you get the idea that I was always running around hunting danger," protested the tropical tramp virtuously. "I was just younger than I am now and a mite headstrong. But, be that as it may, I was mighty interested when, as soon as our conflab is over, Lieutenant Gonzalez falls in his men and finds that he has left only thirty of his own and twenty-six from the machine gun company, including both the top kick and the stable sergeant of the latter outfit. Each man has sixty rounds of ammunition and his Krag-Jorgensen rifle—everything else has went over the hill with the rebels.

"It looks as if the stable sergeant might as well have went over the hill too. He stands there looking as gloomy as if he had just lost a blond wife instead of a bunch of cantankerous mules. However, the teniente didn't seem to be much worried. He divides his men up into two platoons, one under his own first sergeant and the other under the top kick of the M.G. company; then he orders them to start digging a trench right through the center of my pet flower garden, made from seeds that I had imported from the States.

"After supper Gonzalez gets off his messenger and then proceeds to place his outposts, because he ain't got no more faith in Sanchez's keeping his word about the time for the beginning of hostilities then I has.

"All this time I sits around and fumes and fusses, cause here is a nice little war and I ain't in on it. After a little I can't stand it no longer and I hunts up Gonzalez and says—

" 'Teniente, I'm near on to sixty years old and this is the first war I have ever been around that I wasn't mixed up in active, and it worries me—makes me feel kind of yeller.'

" 'Señor Ben,' replies Gonzalez, 'what can you do about it? You are a foreigner and have no real interest in the political affairs of my country.'

" '*Muy* good,' I answers. 'But still a war is a war and shouldn't be wasted on account of a little detail like that you just mentioned. Now if you have no objections, I'll dig up my old Winchester and a case of ammunition and join with you in this fiesta.'

" 'Splendid!' shouts the lieutenant. 'I will make you my second in command and we will go down in history as the bravest of the brave Cubans, who are the bravest people in the world.'

"All is quiet until about 4 A.M. next morning; then an outpost that we has placed about three kilos away reports that Sanchez is on the move and heading our way—no, sir, we weren't surprised none, 'cause it's just what we expected he would do.

"We rousts the men out and gives them coffee; then we sends a runner out to instruct all outguards to fall back and

join the main body just as soon as they have made contact with the enemy; finally we places our men and instructs them not to fire more than is absolutely necessary, but to keep good cover and let Sanchez open the ball.

"'Lieutenant,' I asks, 'how long before we can expect reenforcements, 'cause the situation is getting kind of serious-like in my mind.'

"'Not before tomorrow,' he answers, 'and maybe not then, nor never. It's according to how headquarters in Palma Soriano is going politically, and that's something I can't figure out.'

"Understand this, sir. I could see now that we was in for a nasty scrap. At first I had thought that Gonzalez would just put up a bluff to save his honor and then surrender, but now, on sizing him up, I figures he will do considerable scrapping first.

"Sure enough, in about twenty minutes the rebels' advance guard tangles tails with our outposts who, after blazing away at them, beats it for the house and cover. Next their infantry platoon arrives and deploys in the cane around the house and opens up; bullets is snapping around right considerable, and Gonzalez is having a hell of a time to keep his men from expending their sixty rounds of ammunition.

"Me? I was laying on the flat roof of the house with my glasses, looking for their machine gun platoon. Pretty soon I sees them coming in on a trail behind the corral. I could just see the mules' heads above the young cane and, realizing that my present location was no place for an innocent bystander, I slips back and drops into the patio. Then I hunts up Gonzalez and reports.

"While me and the lieutenant is talking, the stable sergeant of the machine gun company, who you'll remember was one of the few loyal members of that misguided outfit, is listening hard. Instead of being depressed at the situation, when he hears that the mules and guns is in sight, he asks to talk confidential to the lieutenant and they walks off together, the sergeant talking eager and excited and the lieutenant laughing and agreeing with what he says. Then they came back, and Gonzalez asks me to climb up on the roof again and notify him when the mule train reaches the corral fence.

"I climbs back to my observation post, dodging bullets from the cane and between times doing a lot of wondering, and commences to watch for the approaching hardtails when all at once I sees that the sergeant is working his way out behind the house, keeping cover in the tall grass and making for the stone curbed well. Just then the mules arrive at the fence, which is made of palm poles at that place, and the gunners is making ready to unload them.

"'*Ya esta!*' I hollers out.

"The sergeant gets up on his knees, puts his fingers in his mouth, looks lovingly at them mules, and whistles 'mess call'!

"Them animals just raises the devil, breaks away from their *muleteros,* jumps the fence and comes hell bent for election toward the man who had petted them and whistled them to their grub for the last ten years.

"In a minute we corrals them in the patio, and while we are unloading the guns and ammunition the sergeant is feeding them from my precious supply of seed corn.

"Yep, that ended it. We emplaces them Colts, rakes the surrounding cane —and the rebels vamooses.

"And now, sir, since you persist, another drink to the speedy confusion of that professor's durn fool story. I asks you, man to man, if that sergeant hadn't been a whistling son of a gun, where would we have been at?"

OF HIGH COMMAND

A swift and racy tale of the hirelings of war and the heritage of command.

By F. R. BUCKLEY

To his Most Excellent Lordship, my Lord Duke of Costecaldo; from Luigi Caradosso at the farm provided for him by the generosity of his Lordship; these:

SIRE:

As your Highness shall see by the superscription, I am returned to my farm, which seems woundy comfortable and homelike after the splendors of your Grace's court; and I now have my pen in hand to commence the "History Of The *Condottieri*" commanded by your Lordship. The bottles of wine so kindly contributed by your Excellency to refresh me during this task are ranged in the cellar, with some half dozen detached for staff duty where I can reach them without rising; and when the first installment of XXV crowns cometh in, I am to lend money to Jacopo the baker at a good rate of interest. He was inclined to boggle at my terms in the beginning; but then he reflected on the glory of being credited by a man for whom your Grace sent a litter and an escort of soldiers: agreed: and is now hot for my election as *podesta* of this village, which office entitles its holder to free aid in the cultivation of his garden.

It is not generally known that I departed in the litter *under arrest;* my stunning of the four soldiers being ascribed to my annoyance at not being given a horse.

Whereas I (as your Grace, being happily youthful, may not be aware) was formerly lieutenant in the freelances of Pietro Martini, nicknamed *il Diavolo;* and from this position was witness to the rise of Giovanni di Pontevecchio—that model of a *condottiere*—from poverty to the place he now holds.

It is of him I write, according to your

Excellency's command; representing him neither as a good man nor as an example to the young, save in one thing. Born with the lust for high command, and with a contempt for all beside, he had the courage to be what he was, despite the opinion of no matter whom, however expressed.

And he is, may I remind your Excellency, three times a count; once by right of inheritance, once by right of conquest, and once (his county in the south) by purchase; his wealth is fabulous; and, until he disposed of his bands of *condottieri* six months ago, he commanded the greatest single armed force in Italy.

When I met him first, however, in the spring of the year of Our Lord 1535, he was no more than a red haired stripling, very shabbily dressed and bandaged in various places with linen of the dingiest. His hose and doublet had never been mates, though they were now faded almost to a common color; and it appeared that, after the fight which had caused the bandaging, he must have done the patching of his raiment himself.

He looked like anything but the son of a nobleman, albeit the noble in question was so drunken and landless as to be inferior at all points to the average leather merchant; yet such he was—only offspring of my lord the Count Paolo of Pontevecchio; in whose great hall and in whose presence I made the young gentleman's acquaintance.

He came in after my captain and I had spent some half hour trying to induce the count to stop singing and playing upon the zither, and to listen to the instructions with which we had been charged by our employers in Venice.

"You may talk to me, signori," says young Giovanni. "My father is indisposed."

His father, at this, ceased strumming and sat upright for the first time.

"Indisposed!" says the old man with contempt. "I'm drunk and well thou knowest it. There are but three occupations for a gentleman: fighting, making love and drinking."

Upon which he went to sleep with his feet on the table, muttering some words to the effect that his son was a disgrace to him. Aye, it was easy to see why the lands of Pontevecchio were under mortgage. I may here say, indeed, that the Venetians who had sent us were goldsmiths who had made loans upon the security of the county; our instructions were to see that this security was in no way impugned.

"Let us be seated—elsewhere," says Giovanni, with a glance at his snoring sire; and he led us into a sort of turret room where there were two chairs and a straw mattress and devilish little besides.

I judged, by the long sword leaning in a corner, that this was his bedroom; he gave us the chairs, seated himself on the pallet and began to tell us wherefore we had come. He—to tell us! But even as he spoke I was noticing the strange qualities of his eyes and mouth. I will not at this time describe them to your Grace; because what like they were will become manifest as I recount the young gentleman's career. At first glance, however, the eyes struck one as piercing; and the mouth, surmounting a squarish chin, seemed to shut more tightly than the generality.

"The first thing to be settled," says the young gentleman, "is the question of command. You are very much my superior in military affairs, Captain; but then on the other hand, I know the country."

Pietro Martini goggled at him.

"Command?" says he. "What question?"

"Aye. We must decide first of all who is to have supreme command of both forces."

"Both forces?"

"Aye. Mine—they are ragged, but very good fighters for all that; and these troops you have brought. The difficulty is that while your troops are disciplined, Captain, and will follow any leader appointed, my men will do their best only when led by

me. Otherwise we might draw lots for it."

Pietro passed his hand over his eyes and stared at me. But I had no aid to give, being quite as puzzled as he was; and indeed inclined to the belief that the young gentleman before us was mad.

"Is it the proposal," says my captain, "that I should draw lots with the signor to decide whether he or myself shall lead my troops?"

'No," says Giovanni impatiently, "because I know the country better, and, as I say, my men would not follow a stranger. It would be better that I should command—naturally with the captain and the lieutenant to advise me. Is that agreeable?"

I saw Pietro reach my own conclusion—that the poor boy had lost his wits—haha! When next the captain spoke it was in gentle tones.

"Indeed, yes," says he, indulgently. "The only thing is that we lack a campaign wherein your young Lordship might lead. Now if—"

His young lordship arose with a bound.

"What's this?" says he. "Are ye sent here without knowing why ye came? Are all money lenders lunatics?"

"We are here to protect the lands given by his Excellency the count as security—" began Pietro.

"Were you not told that these lands are in the very process of being stolen?" demands Giovanni.

"By whom?"

"By the Count of Two Rivers. He hath half an army on them now, proclaiming that they were part of the dower lands of his cousin's aunt's brother, or some such rubbish. I have driven him off three times, but he cometh back ever with stronger forces, while I have bare fifty men left and no weapons but scythes and the like."

"Oh!" says Pietro; and I saw his eyes take in the various bandagings; eke a long cut, new healed, which crossed the young gentleman's face.

"So I wrote to Venice," says Giovanni, "saying that if they desired our county should still contain the lands and crops on which they had lent money, it would be well to send down troops. And here ye are; all that remains being, as I say, the question of who is to—"

"Aye, aye," says Pietro, scratching his chin. "Well, well. We—we must think this over. Meseems we should send to Venice for orders, Luigi."

"And meantime," says the young man, "the count is harvesting the grape crop; so that there will be no interest paid in Venice this winter. What with the cost of sending you hither for no purpose, signori, this will be a pretty loss. Ah, well! I doubt they will write your names in the Golden Book."

HE MEANT more than he said; and we understood him. The Venetians were then, as the Florentines had been before, by far the largest employers of mercenary troops; they paid well, too; but they were by no means forgiving of failure in their service. This was our first employment by the republic—really, by private bankers of the republic, but that was all one; if we lost money for them, we knew well that there would be hard times ahead. The word would fly about that we were good for nothing; and back we should go variously to the guardrooms, the forges, the quarries and the gutters which we had left to join the band. As for Martini himself—the moment he had no troop behind him, half a dozen different hangings would be his; he had been very disrespectful to the nobility.

So now my captain gnawed his fingers.

"How many men has this count?" he asked.

"Some five hundred, perhaps," says Giovanni carelessly.

"Whereas I," cries Pietro, getting up, "have bare one hundred! Young sir—"

"With mine, one hundred and fifty," says the youth. "And I know the country. If there is one proof better than another that this count's claim is unjust, it is that he is unacquainted with the

very lands he claims. For instance, at this moment he is encamped where a small charge must fling his troops backward bodily into a swamp; he doth not even know the swamp is there. And—"

"I am no syndic, to be judging rights and wrongs," says Pietro; but I saw his eyes glitter. As I have said, he disliked noblemen, especially when they commanded armies.

"Nay. You are a soldier, paid to protect the rights of your employers without question. And as can very plainly be seen, the count is infringing these. Every bunch of grapes taken away is so much—"

"How do I know that it is on these lands that money has been lent?"

"There is no land in the county," says Giovanni sadly, "on which money hath not been lent; only this is all that remains under cultivation. My father's—health—"

"How do I know this land was ever in the county?" demands Pietro.

"By asking the Count of Two Rivers. He will at least admit that for fifty years the land has been ours without question. Now?"

Having no more nails to bite, Pietro took his fingers from his mouth, wiped them on his doublet and snapped them together.

"I'll see him," says he, "this very day."

Giovanni considered him.

"He will be rude and imperious with you," he remarked slowly.

Pietro scowled.

"Aye? Well, there may be need to be rude and imperious with him likewise. And then we may see who can be ruder. Since your Lordship knows the country so well, may I be led to the count's camp as soon as may be?"

"Forthwith."

And so we sallied forth, the three of us, accompanied by a half dozen men of the troop; the young gentleman wearing still his patched doublet and hose (being indeed all he had) and this long sword that trailed on the ground behind him. Since this was a visit of ceremony, he made bold to borrow one of the troop horses to ride, saying casually that when on those previous occasions he had led his scythe armed peasants into battle, he had done so from the back of a donkey.

He was, quite evidently, a young man out of the ordinary; I saw Pietro Martini, who was no man's fool, stealing glances at him as we rode ahead of the escort. No doubt he was asking himself, as indeed I was inquiring of my own soul, just how it came to pass that we were thus riding; without instructions from Venice or any other guarantee that our duty was as this young fellow stated it.

By the time we reached the camp of the Count of Two Rivers, I had come to a realization that, though hired and paid by Venice, we were acting, by some strange enchantment, as the servants of this perfectly strange youth, to save his paternal lands from annexation; and the realization was so stunning that I did not quite apprehend the fact to the full until we were in the presence of the Count of Two Rivers; where, of course, I was forbidden by discipline to say aught to my captain.

"Well," says the count, "and how now?"

He could not (I thought, watching Pietro's face) have made a worse beginning; and he continued accordingly. After a moment of looking from Giovanni to Pietro, he spoke to Giovanni, while at the same time pointing a finger full in Pietro's face.

"Who's this?" he demanded "Some bravo?"

Pietro answered him.

"I have," says he coldly, "the honor to be named Pietro Martini. I am a captain of freelances, in the service of the republic of Venice."

"Ah!" says the count; and reflected. "Wert thou not hanged some months ago in the Romagna?"

"To the best of my recollection, no, my Lord."

"I thought I had heard of some such thing," says the count (and, indeed, it had been a narrow escape for Pietro; we had had to charge through the crowd and cut him down); "Well, since it is not so, what now?"

"I am informed that your Lordship pretends to ownership of these lands."

"I do. Or rather, having established my pretension, I now occupy them."

"They are lands on which, as part of the county of Pontevecchio, certain worthy Venetians have lent money."

"Possibly. Venetians are all fools."

It chanced, of course, that Pietro himself was a Venetian. And proud of it, though heaven knows why; a nasty, wet city that makes my rheumatism ache at the thought of it.

"The money of my employers is in these grapes which your Lordship is harvesting," says the captain in a voice which trembled. "I ask your Lordship to cease, until such time as I may have instructions from my masters."

"Cease?" says the count. "At thy request?"

"At the request," says Pietro hoarsely, "of the republic of Venice, by me here represented."

"And thy commission?"

This was too much—asking a freelance for his commission; the whole use of freelances being to be used in case of need and disowned in the event of trouble. It was a sore spot with Pietro, who had served in the guards of various noblemen, his neck safe whatever he did. I saw the veins swell in his forehead and his hands clench and unclench; and I was just about to grasp his poniard and prevent murder, when the Count of Two Rivers turned his back, burst into laughter and walked away. He went into his tent, still laughing; and I observed, drawn up on our right flank, some half troop of cavalry of his guard; swords drawn and eyes fixed upon us in a way I did not like.

"We have done enough here," I whispered to Pietro. "Come. They await only an excuse to charge us."

"Let them charge!" he roared, glowering at the half troop and shaking his fist in the air. "We will have charges enow ere long!"

With which he mounted, snarled at us and the escort to follow him, and returned to Pontevecchio at full gallop in a cloud of white dust.

Young Giovanni and I, on slower horses, could not keep up with him. We arrived looking like millers and with our throats, noses and eyes full of dust; yet never have I seen such a look of bliss and happiness as overspread the face of the young lord when, in the castle courtyard, he saw Pietro, already dismounted, stamping about the flagstones and yelling for a muster of his sergeants.

"However, it will be better," says Giovanni, coughing and blowing his nose, "if I command."

OF THIS matter we heard more from him that evening, over a bucket of wine that was more than half vinegar; we sat in the unfurnished cell that had been the castle's guardroom and listened to him during two hours, not without amazement. For it developed (during his renewed plea for command, which Pietro very justly refused) that it was the young gentleman's plan not only to clear this particular patch of his domains of occupation by the Count of Two Rivers, but likewise to redeem all the rest of the county, mortgaged as it had been from time immemorial; and to re-establish his family in its former glory. Without a lie!

"To see me in command of real troops," says he pensively, "would have given the peasants new confidence. It was for this reason that I desired leadership, Signor Pietro; not because I mistrusted your ability."

"I am honored," says Pietro, drinking. "But since this can not be, how will your Worship next proceed with his task?"

"I may have to marry wealthily," says

Giovanni, seemingly displeased at the prospect.

"Which is easier said than done," remarked Pietro.

He was a very handsome fellow, with black flashing eyes and curly hair; also he stood head and shoulders above most other men and could bend a horseshoe in his hands. He had some right to believe that if he had lived thirty years without marrying an heiress the matter was one of some difficulty.

Giovanni looked him up and down.

'Perhaps," says he, dismissing the subject. "And now as to our plans for tomorrow: will it be necessary to talk further with the count?"

I saw Pietro clench his hands.

"I shall summon him to retire," says he.

"And if he refuse?"

"I shall charge him forthwith."

"Very good. Now suppose that, before the summons and refusal, I had secreted my own men, in two companies, one to the right and one to the left of the count's forces, in the underbrush. Then, while they awaited your charge, this infantry could attack on the two flanks; hamstring the horses, do what they could to the men and otherwise throw the enemy into confusion. Would that make the task easier? Your object being, of course, to throw back their cavalry into the swamp."

Pietro scratched his chin.

"That would be very pretty," he admitted.

"Then it shall be done," says Giovanni, rising and reaching for a cloak which was even more threadbare than his underclothes. "I will order my donkey forthwith and make a round of the villages."

"In person?"

"I have no servants," says Giovanni, smiling, "—yet."

"At least take a horse."

He shook his head.

"The people are accustomed to a donkey," says he. "If I were not their fellow in poverty, they would not so cheerfully die to raise me above themselves. By the way, at what hour shall you speak with the Count of Two Rivers tomorrow?"

"At dawn."

"Better be later," says Giovanni from the door. "At dawn they will be awaiting an alarm. By ten o'clock, let us say, their vigilance will have relaxed."

"They will have scouts to report the advance of my troops," says Pietro.

"But on the other hand, my men will have been posted since sunrise," says the young man calmly, "and the scouts will never return to the main body, poor fellows. I should advise mid-morning, Captain."

Pietro looked at me.

"Well—" says he doubtfully.

"Mid-morning, then? Good. *A rivederci*, gentlemen."

So (I pass over the discussion between Pietro and myself as to whether young Giovanni was a sorcerer or warlock, thus to intrude on our councils without rebuke) it was at nine o'clock and in a bright sunshine enlivened by the twittering of birds that we rode forth next morning to parley with my Lord of Two Rivers.

We had decided, during the discussion aforementioned, and which had occupied the best part of the night, that whatever the desires of our young and noble friend, we would contain ourselves and act purely as became emissaries of Venice. We would be moderate, cautious; would play for time, and would avoid battle if possible.

We were amazed, riding thus toward the enemy's camp, that a youth had so nearly led us to risk the horses and men which were our stock in trade—or rather Pietro's, for he owned the troop body and soul—in a battle for which, with proper conciliation, there would be no need. At worst (said Pietro when we were halfway there) we could send to Venice for orders without reproach by any save Giovanni; the count could not, after all, gather many grapes in the two days this would take; and if matters were so, most like the bankers would send another troop

to reinforce us and to share in the casualties.

"We are seen!" called a sergeant from behind us; and we saw a horseman in the act of disappearing over the brow of the hill.

So we broke into a gallop, deployed as we came from the ravine where the road was, into the plain where the count had his camp (we could see peasants, up on the hillsides, busy gathering those accursed grapes) and within half an hour were in parley with his Lordship, midway between his troops and ours. He had very nice cavalry and a lot of it.

"Well?" says the count.

"I have the honor to repeat the request which I made to your Lordship yesterday," says Pietro.

"Which was?" asked the nobleman, yawning.

"That your Lordship should forthwith vacate these lands."

"Otherwise?" asks the Count of Two Rivers, carelessly glancing over his shoulder at his troops—which outnumbered us three to one at least.

"Otherwise," says Pietro, "I shall be forced—"

He meant to say that he would be forced to complain to Venice; but the sight of Two Rivers had brought back his rage of the day before and he hesitated. At which moment the count smiled and leaned forward in his saddle and said that such hesitancy in threatening a battle was not becoming to a left handed son of Giacomo Sforza, even when his mother had been a kitchen wench.

And then, of course, there was no further talk of Venice, or of reinforcements, or of anything else but murder and sudden death. I wondered as we wheeled into line of battle how the count had come into possession of this rumor, on account of which Pietro had already killed some half dozen stout fellows; but there was not much time for puzzling.

IN SHORT, we charged; and as we charged—when, in fact, we were halfway to our objective, and the enemy was beginning to get in motion—forth ran, as had been promised, the ragged troops of Giovanni di Pontevecchio; twenty-five from one flank and twenty-five from the other; and with billhooks, knives, scythes and old broken swords, flung themselves at the legs of the horses of the front rank.

Mark you that the line was already in motion; the deed, even in the heat of approaching battle, made my blood run cold; but effective it certainly was. The wounded horses screamed and staggered; threw their riders and themselves collapsed under the forefeet of the second rank. Between the two lines, already in confusion, there uprose as many of Giovanni's ruffians as had not been trampled to death, and stood slashing at the rear rank as it reined in; and into the midst of this hurly-burly, like a thunderbolt pointed with steel, charged our hundred men in two companies twelve paces apart.

It was our inevitable practise to charge thus; so that, after the first shock, the two troops could wheel to the right and left and plough into the enemy flankwise from the center. Pietro had indeed issued orders that on this occasion we should continue straight ahead, the idea being to push the enemy into the swamp; but his rage had choked him, and soldiers are creatures of habit; and so, after we struck, the troops began to wheel as they had always wheeled; and within a minute we found ourselves very ill off. For the second line of the count's troops, though but half of his force, still outnumbered us heavily; it was scarcely shaken, brought to a halt though it had been; and now, under the command of the count himself, it was re-forming a little back of the spot where we were struggling amid the ruins of the front line, and preparing to take us in turn upon the flank.

I was commanding the left squadron and Pietro the right; I dared not turn my troop about without his orders, and he

dared not turn back unless he were sure I should turn back also to aid him. In the midst of which situation, Giovanni di Pontevecchio took the horse of some trooper that had been killed and assumed that command which he desired.

The first I knew of him was that he appeared before me, hatless and almost shirtless, yelling that Pietro had turned about. When I halted the troop at which news, he galloped away like a madman and told Pietro that I had turned without orders and that he must ride back forthwith and assist me. So that, both troops being halted, there was indeed nothing to do but turn them about and close in on the center; and it was again Giovanni, riding by Pietro's side, that bawled forth the order that the troops should not halt to re-form before receiving the charge of Two Rivers' second line, but should instead charge the standing cavalry forthwith—anyhow, front rank men behind, higgledy-piggledy, sixes-and-sevens; but at once. Which was done, though the sight of it made my hair stand up under my steel hat.

Our troops charged—if one can call it charging—in a mad, undisciplined mob. Striking the count's cavalry on the flanks, they spread instead of penetrating, swarmed across the whole front of the line; and with Giovanni hacking and chopping in their midst (I forgot to say that he had picked up an axe during the mêlée) they began simply to push the enemy backward by hand to hand fighting. This ahorse, mark you! Cavalry, which in all ages hath had its only effect from shock of impact!

It was a terrible half hour. At one time, some sixty soldiers detached themselves from the enemy's right flank—we had not men enough to cover them—and tried to ride around and take us in the rear. Answering which, Giovanni himself turned about with ten of our men and charged the sixty. It was madness, of course; but it broke up the formation and brought back the survivors to fight in the general skirmish.

Ah, me! I remember when the first horse trod on that too green grass and sank forthwith almost to the belly. It was the mount of a sergeant in the count's troops; and its rider yelled long and loud of the peril behind his fellows. But it was too late; he did more harm than good with his warning. Because, looking behind them, our adversaries perceived the danger of a death for which they had less taste than they had for steel—and they were losing their love for that too.

So they began to squeeze out of the flanks, as many as were able, and to depart from that place; and the more that went, the more we pushed into the swamp; until finally we perceived that the Count of Two Rivers had taken his departure and permitted the rest of his force to surrender.

We released them—good soldiers against whom we bore no malice; they stayed to help us with the wounded.

It was indeed a corporal of the count's guard who discovered young Giovanni lying under four other men; wounded in six places, but with his ax still clutched in his hand.

SO WE took him back to the castle of Pontevecchio, and we put him to bed in his turret room; and (to be brief) we found at last a physician who was willing to tend him despite the great unlikeliness of payment for his trouble. I doubt if there was twenty crowns in that castle from one year's end to another; the whole countryside knew it; and if this leech appeared willing to serve Giovanni with his art nevertheless, it was only because he had been hired by the Count of Two Rivers to rid the countryside of the young gentleman.

We discovered this when (after a long time during which it seemed that he would die without medical assistance) Giovanni began, and continued, to recover; and the physician prescribed a draught which, being tasted by one of our men playing nurse, caused the said

man to fall down dead. So we overtook the good doctor just as he was crossing the Pontevecchian border; questioned him according to certain principles we had learned during the fighting around Florence; and, after he had told us all he knew, took the remainder of him back to Pontevecchio to be hanged.

Which done (from the topmost window of the castle tower) I descended to find Giovanni risen and struggling into his clothes.

"But you are mad!" says I, laying hands upon him.

He was indeed very pale, and I think, by the wildness of his speech, that he had some fever. Moreover, two of his wounds were of the kind that reopens fatally; but he would not go back to bed. Indeed, he buffeted me in the chest with such surprising strength that I staggered back against a wall and remained dazed while he got both legs into his hose.

"He is quite right," says Giovanni, seemingly to himself. "There is not room for both of us in these parts. He is very right there. Strange that I had not considered this before."

"Who? Considered what?" I asked, trying to withhold his doublet, but at last helping him on with it.

"That there can be but one in power in any locality," says Giovanni, putting on his cloak inside out. "The Count of Two Rivers desires that it be he; when I contest him he attempts to poison me. So be it. Very well. Where is my sword?"

We had picked this up from where he had dropped it on the field of battle, the scabbard lost and the hilt somewhat trampled by a horse. He took it from the nail on which it was hanging and stuck it naked in his belt."

"In the name of the Compassionate," says I, "what is to do?"

"I am going to Two Rivers," says the young man, "and I intend there to fight and to kill this poisoner. Have my donkey made ready."

Assured that he was raving, I advanced upon him again; but he whipped out his sword and pointed it at me, and said that by all the saints he would stab me if I came any nearer. Which he would have done, without doubt; or Pietro; or any one that interfered with what he had in mind to do. So I pretended that I had but meant to offer him my arm; the which accepted, I led him carefully down the stairs and reported matters to Pietro, under pretense of trying to replace the donkey with a horse. And Pietro actually lent the horse, meantime regarding Giovanni with the eye of one who knows he hath met his superior.

"And—hark'ee, Luigi," says my captain. "Go with him, at least some of the way. Perhaps he will fall off his horse before he reaches Two Rivers; in which case bring him back. If not, try to step between him and any that would take his life, and explain that he is mad with the fever. But remember that we leave this place tomorrow."

"Aye, Captain," says I; and rode forth with the young noble as commanded.

He maintained a silence until the heat of the day came on; and then he became delirious, which is why I deal with his history before that of other (and perhaps greater) leaders of his sort. Riding through the heat haze in his shabby clothes; bandaged even more than he had been at our first meeting; face pale, eyes afire and bare sword sticking forth from his waistband at a ridiculous angle, he confessed, imprimis, that it was he who—though by what means I know not—had brought to the notice of the Count of Two Rivers this business of Pietro's which had made battle certain; following which he rehearsed all his beliefs about this life and the next. They were simple ideas, so simple as to be quite beyond the reach of most people; which is why we have never had more *condottieri* than a few; and why, in the present age when every one knows more than is good for him, we are in a fair way to have none at all.

In brief, he believed absolutely in his inborn right to the highest places; and was not estopped by any consideration from trying conclusions with men or circumstances which would debar him therefrom.

All the freelance leaders were the same, your Highness; varying only in the scope of their desires.

Well—

I was compelled, toward the middle of of the afternoon, to use violence on my young friend, to the extent of pulling him from his horse and dousing his head in a brook; whereafter I made him a hat lining of green leaves and he grew calmer; in fact, he fell silent and scarce spoke again until we arrived at the castle of Two Rivers, which appeared to be more or less in a state of siege. All the lookouts were posted; and when we appeared before the great gates (our arrival having been signaled by bugle from the keep) we found the portcullis half down, new ropes on the drawbridge and arquebuses covering us from a dozen slits.

I took this as a compliment; but Giovanni did not even deign to notice it. He called for the seneschal; and when this functionary, gold chain and all, leaned over the battlements, he announced his name and title and demanded speech with the count as though nothing but his intention was of importance in the world.

The seneschal went away and, after some minutes, the count appeared in his place.

"Ha, murderer!" says Giovanni loudly.

Of course I could hear nothing through the arrow slits in those thick walls, but I could imagine the arquebus men looking at one another in delight. So could the count, I doubt not; his hands clenched and he bit his lip.

"Low poisoner," says my companion, "suborner of assassins; in short, dog; I am come to kill thee."

Now some fellow at a gun port laughed out loud; I did hear him; and in my mind's eye saw him gagging himself with one hand while with the other he slapped his thigh. Ah-ha! At how many such conferences between nobles have I myself assisted, in the days when I was young and foolish, and the wine was white and dry! And what words they learn at their universities, or in their mother's boudoirs, or where not! Even as I reflected, Giovanni called his enemy two names which I had never heard before.

"Go away, madman," says Two Rivers. "Go away. I will tell my men to fire."

"Will hands with strength to hold guns obey such a coward as thou art?" Giovanni demanded, adding details as to the count's ancestry which caused several of the muzzles directed at us to shake as their holders hugged themselves. He was not a man to be popular in a guard room, this Count of Two Rivers. Too much ceremonial and too little wine, I judged him.

And so the discussion continued; until, after Giovanni had spoken for some five minutes, his Lordship above seized his hair with both hands and roared an order that we be admitted to the courtyard.

"It is impossible that the count fight with this young man!" I shouted, according to my instructions, but also with another end in view. "He is risen before his time from a bed of sickness; he is not fit—"

Upon which the postern swung open; and, entering between two ranks of guardsmen, we heard the noble lord yelling for his dueling sword. It was scarce a moment before he came down the stone stairs from the battlements with it in one hand and his cloak and poniard in the other.

"So!" says he, in a voice choked with rage.

Giovanni said nothing; merely wrapped his own cloak in the proper fashion and gestured to me for my dagger, which I gave him.

"As I had the honor to inform your Lordship," I began, "this young gentleman is out of his mind; he hath a fever—"

"I will bleed him," says Two Rivers, advancing sidelong. "Ready?"

WELL, of course it was no duel; there was no word given to engage, no rules agreed to, no judge of honor appointed; it was what, among persons less highly placed, would have been a vulgar brawl. The count, sending in a terrific lunge at Giovanni, slipped and stumbled forward almost on to the young man's bosom; and Giovanni, instead of breaking ground and re-engaging, pushed his adversary away by smiting him in the face with the fist which held his poniard. So that the count's nose bled and his eyes watered; as I have seen a carter's eyes and nose do, when another carter has been pummeling him in a ditch.

However, the steel soon came into its own; and hot work did those two make of it. The count had a low pose in fighting—he stood crouched in very bad style, and in general either cut at the knee or drove at the lower belly; whereas Giovanni stood more upright, used his edge very little and pointed for the neck and chest. Once—and my heart stood still at it—he sent in so high a thrust that the count was enabled to do the Milanese trick and disarm him; but luckily the horse trampled hilt of the boy's sword gripped his hand, and the sword fell at his feet instead of flying ten yards. And by some miracle of heaven and his dagger, he managed to pick it up without being run through the stomach; which done, he sent in a cut which left one of Two Rivers' ears hanging loose.

It was after this that the fight became really terrible; the count, furious before, now seemed to have become quite mad. He rushed in, obviously careless whether he lived or died, so only he could be sure of the death of Giovanni; and as your Grace knows, such men are difficult to resist. He abandoned the use of his poniard as a guard; he shook his left arm clear of the mantle and, trusting to his whirling sword to protect him, tried to reach close quarters and stab his opponent with the dagger.

Meantime he was bleeding from his severed ear, so much that the flagstones were becoming slippery; and one of Giovanni's lesser wounds had opened, so that the two men slipped as often as they advanced or retired. And both were growing weary; their breathing sounded loud above the clash of their weapons. At first, they had exchanged insults at each thrust and parry; but now they were deadly silent, except for this roaring in their throats. And it was growing dark—the sky over the battlements was all red and gold and the courtyard seemed to be filled with a blue mist. The guard was crowded about, staring; but none had the sense to fetch a torch.

I heard Giovanni gasp. It was (as he told me afterward) too dark to follow clearly the motion of the blades. He had parried a thrust on the motion of the count's hand; it had been a feint; and before he could recover he had taken two inches of steel into his left arm. Whereupon (and this was the cause of his gasp) he had reached up with the said left arm, regardless of how the sword blade grated on the bone; gripped the steel to hold it in the wound; and, before Two Rivers could relinquish his grasp of the hilt, drove his own point into the count's face.

It was not the *rinverso tondo* across the two eyes; it was just the blind thrust of a man himself in pain; but of a certainty it was effective.

The count loosed his sword, which clattered to the ground; and as he staggered back with his hands to his face, Giovanni ran him through the body twice.

"Murder!" howled the guardsman at my side. "The good count is slain!"

Well, of course he was slain; but that the slaying was murder, or that he was a good count, I denied forthwith by knocking the fellow down. But others took up the cry; now there appeared torches, as it seemed, in battalions; grooms with hayforks came running from the stables; and before Two Rivers had finished writhing, we were surrounded by a mob which, having laughed at the dead man on our be-

half, was now obviously ready to tear us to pieces on his.

It was a grave situation; especially since Giovanni was nigh to spent; and but for the overenthusiasm of a watcher on the battlements, I do not think we should have come out of it alive. But this fellow, having an arquebus and a match and a clear view of us, thought he could shoot us down (much as one of your Grace's historians, having paper, ink, and weak eyes, thought he could write the history of the *condottieri*); which of course was an unwarranted assumption.

Taking no thought of the deceptiveness of dusk combined with torchlight, or of the allowance to be made in firing downhill, he therefore approached his match and fired; sending a good ounce of lead into the skull of a Two Rivers man some ell and a half to our left; whereat all our adversaries bent their heads suddenly and scurried to one side.

It is true that, as I picked up Giovanni and started to run with him toward the postern, no less than three guardsmen recovered from their fright and strove to bar our passage; but between kicking one of them in the belly, and so spiking another that he fell against the third and overthrew him, I managed to pass them and gain the gate—which, God be praised, some one had forgotten to bolt.

And so we reached our horses, which had been peacefully cropping grass outside; and left that place amid some slight whining of bullets. We knew that there would be a pursuit, commencing just as soon as the guards' horses could be saddled, so that we early left the road and turned north across the pastures.

Even so, a patrol found our tracks and followed us until our horses were nearly dead. Our sole chance of eluding them was to ride down the bed of a stream; which we did for a vast time, regardless of heavy falls caused by the shifting of pebbles in the river bed. It was at dawn that—wet to the skin and shivering—we came to a valley to me of course unknown; wherein, to my surprise and the still greater astonishment of Giovanni, there flickered camp-fires which seemed to mark the bivouacking place of an army.

And an army it was; quite a sizable army, as things went in those parts and those days; the army—to be brief and to the point—of none other, in fact, than old Lord Gaetano Faldisi, then starting, in his sixtieth year, to build up a dowry for his daughter. I daresay he had three hundred horse and twice as many infantry; of which latter, some half dozen of the ugliest specimens, doing sentry-go, seized Giovanni and myself and bore us to the old man's tent. He was sitting up in bed when we came before him; looking just what he was—a spice tempered old fire eater with a contradictory taste for high strategem.

"How now? Spies?" he snapped; and through all the ensuing explanations was visibly determined that his next word should be "Gallows!"—until I chanced to mention the name of my captain.

"How?" says he. "Pietro Martini's lieutenant, eh? Well, what answer does Captain Martini send me?"

Knowing of no message, much less answer, I stood dumb for the moment; and Giovanni took the word.

"We have been away from Pontevecchio since yesterforenoon," says he, seating himself on a pile of cushions. "And as for me, I am wounded. I should like wine."

Old Gaetano looked at him.

"Pontevecchio?" says he, pulling his beard. "I had a letter from one of that name—"

"Myself," says Giovanni.

"Oh!" says the old man; and in a tone of alarm; "Sergeant! Have these men their weapons?"

Giovanni rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Boots not to talk thus, my Lord," says he. "We are armed and shall continue to be so. Moreover, when allusion to me is made, pray let it be under the appellation of gentleman. I am fresh from the killing of a noble that forgot just such a courtesy."

"The Count of Two Rivers," says I, after the manner of a chorus. "Your Excellency, there was a misunderstanding about poison, which his Lordship could not explain to this gentleman's satisfaction. Swords were crossed and his Grace is now with his fathers."

"The Count of Two Rivers? Dead?"

The old man, by his starting eyes, seemed in need of absolute assurance.

"As Moses," I informed him therefore; continuing, "And the young gentleman here, having risen from a bed of sickness to slay him, and gained at least one other wound in the combat, I appeal to your Lordship, whether pleased at the fact or no, either to hang us both out of hand, or provide a leech; for evidently Messer Pontevecchio—"

I was so far along when Giovanni clutched for my arm, missed it and fell fainting; at which old Faldisi became monstrous busy ordering physicians and the construction of huts of green boughs; having in which manner disposed of Giovanni, he turned upon me, pulling savagely at his whiskers.

"If I believed in miracles—" says he, eyeing me narrowly. "Harkee, sirrah! On thy neck bone, is Two Rivers really dead?"

"Dead as two feet of steel through the heart can make him," I began; and was proceeding when a messenger appeared in the doorway and saluted.

"Dispatch from the Captain Pietro Martini, my Lord!"

"Mm!" The old man grinned at me. "And the man that brought it?"

"Outside, your Grace."

"Send him in."

And he entered—a man out of my own squadron, so amazed to see me there that almost he forgot to salute. But evidently he knew me; noting which, the old lord broke the seal of Pietro's letter with less of a hanging face.

"Aye," says he, reading. "The Count of Two Rivers is dead indeed; wherefore, as the captain surmises, I shall not need the assistance of his troops. Tell him so, you fellow. Tell him also that his lieutenant is with me; and that if the late count's troops are abroad in the manner this letter details, perhaps the troop had better come claim the said lieutenant here."

"Dismissed!" says I, before his Lordship could get the word out; and, my position thus established, sat down by command to narrate the history hereinbefore told.

It was necessary to tell backward from the death of Two Rivers; and when I came to the statement of how Giovanni had made use of us, and through us of the republic of Venice, to fight his private enemy for him, old Faldisi stared at me, a hand on either knee.

"A remarkable young man," says he thoughtfully. "I had thought him mad. He wrote me a letter, proposing— Tell me, is this Pontevecchio estate indeed as poverty stricken as they say? It is? Ah! That is why I thought him mad. He wrote proposing alliance with my daughter, for our common benefit. Mm. I must think."

He did so for some moments; and then swung suddenly upon me.

"There is no leech about here?" he demanded. "I judge by this tale of the poisoner—"

"No, my Lord."

"M'm. Well, the boy must have skilled care. Since he hath saved me a campaign, I am inclined to take charge of him myself."

"Campaign, my Lord?"

"Yes. I was on my way to fight Two Rivers for a village; now he's dead, I shall have it without bloodshed. Yes. Yes. I'll send a messenger to Pontevecchio saying that the lad's under my care, and take him with me to Bugasto. I have the best doctor in Italy. Very well, Lieutenant. Dismissed."

And so there was an end of our adventures about Pontevecchio. Pietro and the troop came for me that afternoon; and while Pietro spoke with his old Lordship in his tent, I said goodby to Gio-

vanni, who lay on a pallet very pale; but with a look in his eyes which caused me to wonder—convinced as I was that old Faldisi's charity was for old Faldisi's own ends—who would finally utilize the other; whether the old man the young, or the young man, sick and inexperienced as he was, the old.

I was soon to learn.

WELL, our first duty was to go to Venice and report progress and collect the balance of our pay; which accordingly we did. And were about to be entrusted with another commission of the same sort when there arrived an offer of employment from none other than old Faldisi himself. The pay was less than we should have got from the Venetians; but for one thing Pietro had lost his bellyful of men in the Pontevecchio business, which prejudiced him (quite unjustly) against the further service of moneylenders; and for another thing, he had been struck by a great admiration for old Faldisi. So that, though there was some show of consulting me, and I cast my vote for the sprightlier service of Venice, of course we went to Bugasto; in the library of which palace behold us, a week later, in council of war with our master. There were the usual compliments, and we inquired after Giovanni; to which:

"He—I—well, as you know," replied his Lordship, "I have a daughter."

Pietro bowed. We had seen the young lady as we marched into the courtyard; and Pietro had stared at her more than I thought fitting; a slim young thing she was, in a blue gown.

"She—I—in short," says the old man, "I will be plain with you. She is to marry. I am building her dowry. I have the village I desired from Two Rivers; I need another, which belongs to a young lord to the south of me. Hence my employment of your troop.

"At a very low price," I put in, and wished I had stayed silent.

A nasty eye had his Lordship; a damned hemp spinning, noose tying look as ever I saw.

"Yes," he agreed, "because, detesting violence and preferring stratagem, I propose to risk the lives neither of men, horses, nor even lieutenants."

"The noble of the second part," says Faldisi, continuing to stare me out of countenance, "is now at my court; a young fellow against whom (as I was saying when I was interrupted) I would employ no violence. I have accordingly sent messages to some dozen bands of free-lances, including yourselves, and called in their leaders to conference. Without intent to engage them, of course; purely so that the young lord with whom I am negotiating may think that I have these bands, in addition to my own army, at call nearby. I trust I make myself clear?"

He made himself only too clear, the pinchbeck, denier squeezing old rogue! Wasting the time of hard working soldiers during the best fighting months of the year! Yet I said nothing; nor Pietro either.

"To clinch the impression I hope to have made by all these visits," says the old rascal, eyeing me sternly. "I plan to send your troop away as I have sent the others, but only to a little distance, where my guest, during his pleasure rides, may assure himself of your continued presence. He will assume that all the other troops are likewise in the neighborhood; and when he sees that I retain you, Captain, and you, Lieutenant, here at the castle, will he not further assume that you are here as captain and lieutenant-general of the combined forces? I think so. And I think that, rather than face the prospect of attack by such an army, he will cede the village I need without argument. Ha-ha!"

He giggled and hugged himself at his shrewdness. As for me, I thanked God I had a strong stomach.

"You have a memorandum," says he, with a quick return to reality, "of the price agreed?"

"For a month's service," says I; be-

cause this seemed an affair to drag on for weeks.

"A month, aye," says Faldisi, loathing me. "And now, Captain, may your lieutenant be dismissed? I have no further business in his province, and I should like—"

Pietro nodded to me; and so I sallied forth in quest of my young friend, Giovanni di Pontevecchio.

I had wondered, as aforesaid, which was to use the other for his ends—old Faldisi him, or he the old gentleman; and, finding him still at court, and moreover lodged in luxury on the second *piano* of the south tower, I began to have an opinion. *Corpo di Bacco*, what lodgings he had, this penniless youth! Glass in all the windows; tapestries; carpets; and a manservant who supplied us with most excellent wine. Even the couch on which the boy lay—wearing no more than two of his most important bandages—was of brocade worth six months' pay the ell.

"I am glad to see thee, Luigi," he said, after we had drunk. "I have been lonely at court here; the more so, of course, because my intentions are known."

"Intentions?"

"Of which I told thee at Pontevecchio. If not by arms, by marriage. To wed the Lady Bianca."

"To wed the—?"

He looked at me with impatience.

"Come, come, Luigi," says he.

"Moral me no morals like the rest. Pontevecchio must be mended; I should have preferred to do it by force of arms, but troops are scarce and command hard to come by. Wherefore, thou knowest the proverb: 'Who travels, takes any road.' "

I stared at him dumbfounded. He yawned.

"I trust," I said dazedly, "that your Honor's suit prospers?"

"Well enough. There is a cousin of the lady's who hates her as she loathes him, and who yet hangs about despite my lord's hints that he's unwelcome. When I'm recovered, I'll take order with him, and he'll bother us no more. Ah, me!"

Ah dio! I was even then an old soldier, harder in some ways than I am in these my later years; yet now I boggled at this so singularly cool young man. Here, methought, was the answer to my wonder as to who should use whom—and what an answer! He was serving himself of old Faldisi and the lady just as he had served himself of us and our troop; for the same one purpose, and with an equal lack of shame to gain command. He was, as I said, a born *condottiere.*

"Your Honor has fallen very well," I said from a dry throat, my eyes staring my amazement. "The lady herself is not unattractive, if I may say so."

"It is permitted to remark on the obvious," says he wearily; and then, rolling over lively on his side, demanded—

"How goes the troop?"

Ah, now he showed interest! I told him all went well and that we were looking for a cannon to be bought cheap. At this, he actually sat up and his eyes sparkled.

"Have it of leather, well banded," he adjured me. "Mark you, Luigi, iron guns are useless except for fortifications. It stands to reason that, leather being lighter than iron, or bronze either, it must ever be better for maneuver by flying troops. I hear that in Florence they are casting little short iron guns, but mark me again—"

And so he continued, all aglow and sawing the air with his arm, until his leech came in and bade him lie down; whereafter I strolled forth to see what quarters had been provided for me, and to pass the time of day with any officers of the garrison that might seem amiable.

They were all amiable—the captain, the four lieutenants, and the eight sublieutenants; and valiant topers as well; so that about midnight I strolled forth again—for a breath of fresh air. The sky, I noticed with approval, was of a deep blue, plentifully powdered with stars. Looking up at these, I noticed the forms of Giovanni and of the Lady Bianca, standing

close together in the shadow of the east tower. Things looked well for the re-establishment of Pontevecchio.

To whose company there added itself, as I watched, a third figure; that (I surmised) of the inconvenient cousin.

AND NOW I endeavor to recall my remembrances as to just what next occurred; with but fair success. There were so many officers in garrison at that time and the wine was so excellent. Had I, for instance, any idea that, in addition to his one stratagem of which I knew, and which was almost at a successful conclusion, that old rat of a Faldisi had any other scheme on hand? I think not. It was a week later, unless my memory deceives me, that the old man celebrated his deception of the young lord Ugo Stranieri (the one who had the village) by giving a *fiesta;* and it is clear in my memory that I attended this function in a suit of red velvet and a most humorous frame of mind.

What time the lutes and viols playing for the quality within walls, and the populace without howled "Long live our Lord Gaetano!" with a fervor which waned as the wine barrels were emptied, I reflected how amusing it was that while the old lord was spending all this money to mark his triumph of subtlety over Stranieri, he himself should be serving Giovanni di Pontevecchio as a kind of mounting block to higher things—and showering Giovanni with benefits for so using him.

I was not able to view the process with Giovanni's cool detachment—which is perhaps why I have remained a soldier while he hath become a count; but if the young man's callousness appalled me, the old schemer's innocence made me laugh. So that for me—out of armor and at liberty to take a jorum in the guard room when I felt like it—the *fiesta* was most joyful; until about half an hour before midnight, when I observed trouble of some sort at the far end of the hall, down by the dais which Faldisi occupied with his victim-guest. Slipping gently through the crowd, and concealing myself behind two convenient orange trees, I perceived that the parties to the brawl—it was little less—were Bianca, her cousin, and young Giovanni di Pontevecchio. The lady's father was leaning down from his chair of state with one hand cupped about his ear, seemingly in the capacity of umpire.

"I say," says the cousin in a loud voice, "that this stranger will not permit me to dance with Bianca!"

"Oh!" says old Faldisi, sitting up. "Well?"

"Well, uncle, I would say—"

"What? Say it, then! The dance ends!"

"I would say," shouts the cousin, enraged beyond discretion, "that when the lady hath relatives present, it is scarce seemly—"

"Brawling is unseemly," says old Faldisi sternly. "Let us understand ourselves, young man. Thou'st never cared to seek my daughter's company so much before; and now, art thou her betrothed, to control her actions? Enough of this!"

And so off went Giovanni and the girl together, while the cousin stood red faced at the foot of the dais biting his nails. I saw old Faldisi glance down at him, thus standing, from time to time; but as heaven is my witness, I had no thought of connecting these glances, strangely interested as they seemed, with the old man's remark about betrothals.

I thought Giovanni had the whole matter in hand and, in some sort, rejoiced thereat. How was I to know that, having just succeeded in one wild stratagem by the grace of heaven and the credulity of young Stranieri, Faldisi was embarked on a second scheme wilder than the first; having for its butt none other than Giovanni; compared with whom Stranieri was a cooing dove?

My introduction to this amazing fact came when the dance ended. The fiddlers were mopping their brows; most of the dancers were at the long tables where the

wine was; my captain, Pietro, looking very handsome and bowing as though he had been about courts all his life, was suing to be Bianca's partner in the next *furlana;* and Giovanni, approached by the furiously scowling cousin, was quite at liberty to step out with him upon the battlements. Which he did; and within ten seconds had both given and received a resounding box on the ear.

At the double smack of which I showed myself.

"Gentlemen!" says I. "Is this in order? To slap faces! O fie!"

They stood, one on either side of me, straining against my outstretched arms and breathing heavily through their noses.

"I have no sword here," growls the cousin.

"Nor I, curse you, or—"

"Well, but," I told them reasonably, "there are swords to be had, are there not? But in mercy let's have no more of this ear boxing and vulgarity. Tut-tut! Here, you fellow! My compliments to the lieutenant of the guard, and I have need of two swords, exactly similar, wherewith to show a friend a trick of fence. In haste! Begone!"

So he went and returned with the weapons; and departed doubtfully, looking from one to the other of the young gentlemen with apprehension; and we adjourned to a patch of grass behind the stables which I had noted, on my arrival in the castle, as very proper for an affair of this kind. There was a brilliant moon which—though I offered torches—the combatants agreed would furnish all the light they required. *Dio mio,* but they fretted to begin! When I asked Giovanni if his wounds were healed enough for such doings, he cursed me to my face; as did the cousin when I pointed out that another witness should by propriety be present.

And then they were at it, very hard at it indeed. Having no cloaks and daggers, they fought more in the French style, moving so fast and so widely that several times they almost knocked me down. The cousin was a game cock, and had been well taught; it was visible from the first that the fight would be a close one. When, after a few minutes it became evident that Giovanni had just enough superiority to insure his victory, and thus guarantee old Faldisi's approval for the affair, can it be wondered at that I laid aside all misgivings and devoted myself to enjoying the spectacle? Especially since Giovanni, whose advantage of skill could have brought the affair to a quick conclusion vouchsafed, by dint of using his edge rather than his point, to draw out the battle for my delectation.

Aye, instead of thrusting, which his opponent was doing at every opportunity, my young friend essayed delicate cuts and slices; whereof one—a feather-like raking slash across his opponent's forehead—was worthy of a master. I thought that it would bring the business to an end; so neatly placed was it and so torrential was the flow of blood it induced; but the cousin wiped his eyes, tied my handkerchief about his brow and insisted on continuing.

Indeed, he continued so fast and so furiously that for some seconds even my eye could not follow the several interchanges; the first thing I saw thereafter was Giovanni trying a thrust for the shoulder and the cousin scooping it up to make a long gash in his right cheek.

And just as I was wondering what novelty might be next brought to light, up comes a corporal's file, running as though pursued by the devil; he stops the fight—that beautiful fight, just at its best stage—and takes all three of us into custody. The lackey that had brought us the swords had at last dared confide his suspicions to the old lord; and the corporal's orders were to take us into his Lordship's presence forthwith.

Which was done; and never shall I forget the howl wherewith his Grace greeted the wreckage of his nephew.

I say his Lordship howled; he did more; he gibbered and took his few gray hairs in both his hands and tore them; both of

which manifestations were better than what followed. Indeed, at last I had to speak sternly to him, noble or no noble; saying that if he persisted in calling me a bravo and a procurer and a suborner of murder, I would stab him and hang for it. At the which offer, he became more violent even than before; spewing out unstinted the whole of this precious plan of his—of which I have hinted heretofore; yet of which I was, up to that moment, as innocent as the babe unborn.

And what was this plan? Or rather—for it was ruined now—what had it been? Merely to marry his daughter to her cousin, and thus fuse the fortunes of the two branches of the family; the function of Giovanni in the affair—Giovanni the cool schemer on his own account—being merely that of a decoy; who by his assiduities should arouse the cousin's interest in the girl.

Of course, even in his frenzy the old man did not state the matter as clearly as I have done; but I understood him and stood aghast; so did Giovanni, and turned white to the lips. The cousin did not, owing to the circumstances of having fainted on a nearby couch. Seeing which, old Faldisi became to all appearance a madman; and was ordering the guard at once to fetch a doctor and put us under close arrest, when the door opened and in came my sweet captain Pietro, all in his ball dress, wearing a rose similar to some Bianca had carried, and sweating like a horse. He had heard rumors and he was no commander to leave his lieutenant in distress.

"I would suggest, rather," says he calmly, when Gaetano had raved at him for some moments, "that the guard pick up the wounded gentleman and put him to bed. He is bleeding over the embroideries. With all due respect to your Lordship."

It was oil on the troubled waters. Gaetano, after a moment's hesitation, nodded assent and sat down; exhibiting no more than a tendency toward apoplexy.

"May I point out to your Excellency," continues my captain, "that it will not be well to arrest my lieutenant thus, at this moment, when the young count downstairs may still see his error and refuse to sign the treaty. There is talk in the ballroom of some such action on your Lordship's part; and when I left the young gentleman appeared to be afflicted with doubts. Captains-general of freelances are not seized by corporals' files."

"Art thou aware of what has passed?"

Pietro bowed.

"Indeed, yes. It was in some sort due to a miscalculation on your Lordship's part. Still, your Lordship's nephew is not seriously hurt; he will be fit for the altar within three weeks, judging by what I saw of him; and all may yet go well. Provided there be no open scandal, such as your Excellency was confecting when I came in."

Gaetano gave a sort of snarl and chewed his fingers. This seemed to be a habit that ran in his family.

"All's lost," he said. "All's lost. And through that puppy!"

Now he got up and pointed a finger in Giovanni's face.

"He had the impudence to think that my daughter was for him!" croaks the old man. "A penniless, starveling wastrel that—"

Pietro stepped quickly in front of the young man, while I seized both his arms from behind. But he made no move to spring on my lord, or spit in his face or the like of that. He seemed perfectly dazed.

"This is unprofitable talk," says my captain sternly. "I advise your Lordship to leave abuse, especially when it is undeserved, and to think what is next to be done."

"I'll have my lackeys beat him through the main gates!"

"That would cost your Lordship several servants and lose him both the marriage and the village. Neither affair will bear much exposure to the public gaze."

"What, then?"

"Excellency," says Pietro with a conspiratorial leer, "I would do as follows.

Retaining myself and Caradosso and consulting with us even more frequently and confidentially than heretofore, I would dispatch this young gentleman, with every honorable observance, as it were, to take command of our troops in the field. Your Lordship may believe me, this affair of the village is not yet concluded; after tonight the present owner will require additional persuasion before he signs; as I say, his doubts were visible across the ballroom. If he could only see both Luigi and the young Messer di Pontevecchio, not only high in your Lordship's favor, but engaged in even more active preparations for war, he might be convinced once again."

WELL, at first the old man would have none of it; I think it was the proposal to send Giovanni off with a guard of honor that stuck in his aged crop. Indeed, when Pietro (rather maliciously, I thought) insisted on this as essential to the deception, we had a lamentable scene; Gaetano spitting reproaches at Giovanni for his poverty and presumption; and Giovanni thanking God in a loud voice that his poverty had been gained without dishonor, particularly in the respect of false hospitality.

"Thou'st no hospitality to offer!" bawls old Gaetano.

"No, nor no daughter to foist off on the unsuspecting by trickery, as butchers do spoiled meat."

"Gentlemen!" says Pietro in haste. "Let us leave personalities and come back to the matter in hand. It is a question of whether your Lordship still desires this village or not. If so, I advise once more the plan I have suggested. After all, the honors paid need not exceed half a dozen men for the escort and the guard presenting arms."

Which were accorded, after more wrangling; and Giovanni rode forth the next afternoon, duly commissioned by Pietro as his lieutenant. Among those who watched his departure were the young lord from whom Gaetano was stealing the village (he signed the treaty three days later), and the Lady Bianca; whose eyes, fixed for the most part upon Pietro, seemed to reproach him for sending away her lover.

Seemed, I say.

Ha-ha!

Well, I trust that I have made it clear that by this expedient of commissioning Giovanni—in name only, though even that was against custom and our own ideas of propriety—we had been moved by but one consideration; a desire to save the boy from being imprisoned, and having his throat cut, or being pushed down a well or such-like. From which display of loving kindness, what befell?

May it be believed that this young devil of a Pontevecchio took our beautiful troop, never hired forth for less than five thousand crowns, and went hunting bandits? Not bandits in a large way of business, either; a dirty small band that earned its living robbing merchants on the highway from Rometia to Bugasto. So had they annoyed the burghers that rewards were offered for their capture; one of five hundred crowns by the guild of goldsmiths in Rometia, and another of a thousand by the Lord Gaetano.

The troop, having been long idle in the countryside, had heard of this band; even knew—perhaps by process of fraternal drinking in wine shops—of its habitual retreat in an abandoned marble quarry. And of course the men were weary of inaction; which however was no excuse for their taking orders from another than Pietro or myself, commission or no commission; much less for their starting forth to the chase of these wretched robbers with shouts and whoopings.

They pursued them all over the county—through villages, across churchyards, and through standing crops; and the wails of the peasantry (who had nothing whereof to be robbed) resounded to heaven and the castle at Bugasto. Pietro, sweating cold drops of puzzlement, retained enough presence of mind to say that he feared his

troops were getting out of hand; which I think was in fact what led the young lord to sign the treaty.

So we left the castle the next day; but not in time to interfere with Giovanni his sport. Having devastated half the countryside, he had drawn off the pursuit long enough so that the bandits might flee to their lair; which, their horses and themselves being exhausted, they did in the evening, toward nightfall.

The young man had then waited until after dark; posted our troop across the only way of escape from the quarry; and himself climbed to the top of the marble cliff overhanging the bandit camp. There was a sergeant with him—one of our oldest and most reliable men, as we had thought; which ancient was entrusted with the lighting of a torch and the holding of it behind Giovanni while the young man called on the bandits to surrender.

Of course, there was a great running for arms, and an evident disposition on their part to die fighting, rather than to be hanged. Which was no part of Giovanni's plan. He informed the poor dazed wretches that he had taken his troop's entire stock of gunpowder and so placed it behind the cliff that one dip of his sergeant's torch would light a train, and within two minutes blow the whole face of the quarry down upon them.

"Think of the horror of it!" he roared forth upon their terrified silence, and the sergeant said later that his own flesh prickled. "Buried alive in your sins, without chance of absolution or repentance. Wicked men, reflect!"

And so they surrendered without a blow struck; and Pietro and I, about to leave Bugasto as aforesaid, were amazed to see our troop itself drawn up in the public square; Giovanni at its head, and the entire company of bandits (afoot and roped together) in the midst.

"I have already received five hundred crowns from the Rometians," said Giovanni to our stunned faces, "and divided it among the troop. The thousand now owed me by old Gaetano, I shall take and pay off mortgages with it, save for two hundred crowns to our good Luigi here. And of course I have confiscated the prisoners' horses, to the number of thirty-five; which with their arms and accoutrements fall to your share, Captain."

It irritated Pietro still more (and I sympathized with him) that in all this outrageous business now exposed to us, there should be no just basis for complaint. The troop had not lost a man; indeed, it was in better condition for the exercise; and we ourselves had profited largely both in money and in horseflesh, which meant that we could increase our strength.

"But my powder!" roars Pietro, after some reflection. "My precious powder, and no more to be had nearer than Florence!"

"But it is untouched," says Giovanni, smiling at him indulgently. "You did not think I had really put powder on the cliff?"

I am chuckling as I write, your Highness; not so much at thought of the trick played on the robbers, as at the panorama of Giovanni di Pontevecchio his life. I have exhibited him to your Grace as he was three months before—pale, poverty stricken and buried in a remote hill county, seemingly without hope of resurrection.

I present him now; raised by the pure operation of his spirit to temporary command of near two hundred men and to permanent lieutenancy in the troop—for we had to commission him; the men would have rioted else. I show him well dressed, well mounted, and well off in point of money; using Pietro and me—his superior officers—as his bill collectors against old Gaetano, whom he steadily refused to see.

"But the young lady?" I asked him.

He shrugged.

"An expedient that failed. Thou knowest the proverb, 'Who travels takes any road'; but preferably the shortest. This—" and he gestured at his troop—"is nearer my goal."

No thought for the girl; no care for what I, or Pietro, or the world at large might think of him for surrendering her thus tamely. "An expedient failed"—and he had lost no time in pressing onward from it. And indeed he was nearer his goal of high command than he would have been after marriage, so long as old Faldisi should live; though with Pietro and myself still in vigor he was (I reflected, ha-ha!) far enough from it even now.

Two days whereafter what should come to our camp but a note, sent secretly from Lady Bianca by a maid, informing Giovanni that until such time as she consented to marry her cousin, she was shut up in the Castello di Valdifiore—and imploring him, on his manhood, to save her.

Well, either by force of stupidity or in absence of mind occasioned by the sight of our men, the maid brought this note first to Pietro. It had no superscription, so he tore it open and read it; and, since I chanced to be in his tent at the time, there was thenceforth no doubt in my mind as to the cause of a certain recent change in my captain, which showed itself in occasional dreaminesses very much against his former habit, and a greater liability to anger than had been his wont.

Reading the letter, he had scarcely blushed and gone pale again when I knew what ailed him, carefully as he had hidden the affliction; aye, he was in love with the Lady Bianca Faldisi, poor fellow; had been, most like, since the night of that ball, when she had given him the flower. And to such an extent that he was unable to conceal the fact even from his successful rival; for when Giovanni returned and was handed the letter with explanations as to why the seals were broken, Pietro's voice still trembled.

"WHAT?" says Giovanni, looking sharply from him to the letter and from the letter back to him. Whereafter, all smiling and glowing with triumph as he was (he had been out with his third of the troop, most scandalously swindling a small duke that had need of us) he seated himself and opened the missive; at whose conclusion he pushed back his helmet and stared from Pietro to me with an aspect of extreme despair.

"Ah *diavolo!*" says Giovanni. "Rescue her! From the Castle of Valdifiore! Ah *dio!*"

"A strong place?" asked Pietro hoarsely, his hands twisting.

"Strong enough," says the young man, his eyes searching my captain's soul, or examining what he had already found there. "Out of repair, but still fifty men could hold it against a thousand. *Diavolo, diavolo, diavolo!*"

He continued to stare at Pietro. Much, I should say, as a lapidary examines a strange stone that may yet be valuable.

"We—we are your friends, Giovanni," says my captain, in that same strained voice; at which the boy leaned forward sharply.

"I'm aware on't," he said, in the tone of one who has made up his mind. "But the castle's proof against ten such troops as ours."

"Is it proof against two such men as ourselves?"

"Two?"

Alack, at what a rate was he exposing himself, that poor Pietro! And what could I do—and that against my better judgment—but try to cover him by saying gruffly that I was as fond of Giovanni as he was, and that therefore we should be three in the venture. Whereat the young man's eye flickered at me with a devil's twinkle in it if ever I saw one.

"That is kind," says he slowly, resuming his jeweler's appraisal of Pietro. "It—it might be done."

And—not to harrow your Grace with too much detail—done it was; carried through that very night; as cursed uncomfortable, dangerous affair as ever I was about; and yet more distressing to my brains than to my body.

For through all my miseries—the ride to the castle through a pitch dark full of

low branches; the stumbling about its walls through heather and sharp briers, feeling for some ill repaired spot possible to climb; aye, through the climbing of it —and once I hung by one slipping hand, fifty feet above the dry moat; through the strangling of a sentry who had his very mouth open to yell the alarm, and through that further most perilous creep by the three of us, down the ramparts to the state chambers which most likely housed Bianca—my mind was in more discomfort than my carcass.

To be shot, stabbed, or hanged, is one thing; to be mystified past hope of solution is another; I prefer the first. That Pietro should thus have fallen, enmarveled me not; nay, I was not even amazed that, before our departure, he should have roared that the troop might go to hell—Giovanni the meantime hanging over it, making provision and giving instructions as if the men had been his own sons and the horses all Arabs of purest breed.

Any one may become mad. But Giovanni was not mad. Nor was he in love with this Bianca. Nor—since his joining of our troop—had he need of her. Nor, from all I knew of him, was he the man to risk his finger nail, much less his skin, for chivalry or friendship or aught but his own advantage.

Why, then, was he engaged in this mad affair, which, if by some miracle it advantaged any one, would benefit Pietro alone? Was he by chance indeed amorous of the girl himself, and concealing his passion, for dignity's sake, until such time as her father should not have the better of him? Such a trick would have been like him, and such concealment well within his powers; and yet—

The light behind the panes of the state apartments went out; the girl had gone to bed. Did I say that, while we crouched on the sentry walk, we had been stumbled upon by a second watchman? Aye, poor fellow. Well, with two men thus accounted for, we felt reasonably sure that we had the south wall to ourselves; yet it was with misgivings that we considered the problem of warning the lady we were there. Most like she would have a *duenna*, who might scream; and if so—

"Hast no signal with the lady?" I asked Giovanni. "A private whistle, or the like?"

"Aye."

"Then creep forward and perform it," says I. "Tootle it within an inch of the pane, and *pianissimo*, if life has any value to thee. And when she opens, tell her to dress."

Which he did; and how long modesty kept us out there! Giovanni in particular was furious; I could tell it by the sound of his breathing as I squeezed past him, over the low window sill, into the darkened room.

"Are there shutters on the inside?" he demanded. "Bianca, I say! Are there shutters on the inside of these windows?"

"I do not know."

Whereat he snorted; found that there were; closed them, and then, in a voice more suited to parade grounds than bedrooms, demanded light. Meseemed that Bianca's voice, telling him, had a chill tone; which became chillier after Pietro (standing moderately close to the lady, I noticed) had jestingly asked Giovanni why he was so gruff.

"Because I'm not here for pleasure or pretty speeches, but to—Bianca, in the name of heaven, what like of dress is that for traveling?"

"'Tis all I have. My others are in the anteroom with my maid."

"Hadst no idea of keeping a cloak or such-like, against we should come for thee? Well—"

Quite evidently disgusted, he turned to the bed; tore off the sheets, which were of silk; and, with me holding one corner of each, began to cut them into strips with his sword. I had time to glance about, and of course my first glance not only confirmed what I knew about Pietro, but taught me also something about the Lady Bianca.

I will not go so far as to say she was already in love with my captain; indeed I

believe she was not—any more than she was truly in love with Giovanni. But imprimis, he was a handsome fellow, as I have said; secundo, she had danced with him while Giovanni had been starting the brawl which had brought her hither; and in the third place, Pietro had been reverent and gentle in this time of stress, whereas Giovanni had been rude.

It is true that Giovanni was working for her rescue, while Pietro, by his standing outside and his present inaction, was imperiling the same; but such considerations occur not often to women. So that she looked up at the captain, and smiled.

The smile died suddenly when she heard a clang of arms on the battlements; and even the fond expression on Pietro's face became, for the instant, a look of apprehension. The guard was being changed; our presence in the castle was about to be discovered; I confess that my own heart sank slightly.

As for Giovanni, he merely set his teeth, requested me to pull harder, and went on destroying sheets.

"Luigi," he snapped. "Go open those other windows, look out, and see how far down to the ground. If 'tis too dark, throw out something and listen to the fall. Pietro—come hold this sheet."

There were windows opposite to those by which we had entered—glazed with plain glass, but beautiful in my eyes for all that—giving on the open country beyond the castle's south wall. I threw out a silver candlestick and estimated the drop at forty or fifty feet; about the same distance as we had climbed up the other wall.

"Four, and two six, and three nine. We have enough," muttered Giovanni, counting his strips and sitting on the bed. "Pull over something heavy, Pietro, that we may have wherewithal to anchor the rope. Luigi, hast thou any skill in knots?"

But before I could answer, there was an interruption. From the battlements—just as near at hand as we had left that second sentry—there arose suddenly the blare of a bugle blowing the alarm; a thud of feet and a jangle of armor approached the window; and, after a wild rapping on the shutter muffled panes, there came to our ears a bull voice, hoarse and breathless, demanding of the Lady Bianca whether she was there and safe.

"Answer!" whispered Giovanni, knotting furiously at two strips of sheet and looking at the girl with burning eyes.

She stood silent, staring at him. He dropped his work, went over and shook her by the shoulder.

"Answer that all is well; pretend to be sleepy;" he commanded; but alas, it was quite in vain.

The pupils of my lady's eyes were dilated with terror; she was deathly pale, and her voice, to judge by the soundless working of her lips, had frozen.

"Reply, my lady," calls another voice. "Or we burst in the window."

This was the captain of the guard; I could hear him giving orders, in a low voice, to other men who came a-running.

"Speak!" whispered Giovanni. "Speak, woman!"

But she could not; so he turned away. I, meanwhile, had been joining sheets together; now I arose and did the work to which Pietro had been ordered—the pulling forth of a great chest whereto to tie the rope. It was just as I got it to the middle of the floor and was resting from the labor of moving it without noise, that we received notice as to what had been those muffled orders of the captain.

The maid shrieked in the antechamber, as her unbolted door was thrust open; there came a hammering on that of the room wherein we stood; and at the same moment the party on the battlements sent in the panes of leaded glass with a smash.

WHAT a hurly-burly there was when they found the shutters closed! Aye, they knew the worst then, and they tried to burst in the sturdy oak with their shoulders. This failing, they jabbered among themselves; out of which confusion rose the captain's voice, addressed to his flanking party.

"Break in the chamber door!" he bellowed. "Blow the lock off!"

There was no use of concealment now, so that I made short work of dragging the chest to its assigned place under the window. For Giovanni, the task was otherwise. I had joined the sheets with knots which were very well for rope, but worthless on such slippery stuff as silk; and, cursing horribly, he was at the task of undoing them and tying them afresh.

As for Pietro, he was standing in the middle of the floor, drawn sword in one hand and the girl clenched tightly in the crook of the other arm. I supposed that she would have fallen had he not held her thus; but Giovanni called him vile names nevertheless.

"Stand clear!" roared a voice from the antechamber; there was a bang and a flying of wood and bits of metal; and the next instant the door was down and we stood naked to a world that seemed populated entirely by men at arms. They rushed in pell-mell, as many as could crowd through the opening; and I noticed, as I went to meet them, that Giovanni's first act had been to put the candle in safety. I should never have thought of it, but of course darkness is on the side of the largest numbers.

Pietro was by my side, having pushed the Lady Bianca to the other end of the room; and together we faced four men, of whom three, thank God, carried halberds. This is a nice weapon for use against farmers and similar simple folk; but in combat with a sword armed soldier, it is but an embarrassment to its bearer. We dealt with these three quickly, and together disposed of the fourth. After which there was a moment's pause, and I looked around for Giovanni. He was still struggling with my knots, his sword lying bare on the bed beside him; while not far away Bianca stood, gazing at him and wringing her hands.

"Fight, fight!" I heard her cry; and was then compelled to turn my attention once more to the doorway.

The captain himself had come from the battlements and had shouldered his way through the guards that thronged the spiral staircase; a vast man with whom I had drunk (as aforesaid) at Bugasto. He had been one of the second lieutenants in Faldisi's army of conquest, and was reputed for his skill with the rapier. He did indeed hold the two of us in play for some minutes; but then the game was spoiled by the bursting in of his second in command, and no less than four soldiers, all of whom let drive at us.

By rights, the soldiers should have fallen to my share; but I had to make a rush and chop the wrist of the man who had blown in the door—he was reloading—and so I found myself alone in a corner with the captain. Who gave signs, much as it goes against the grain to admit it, of being too strong for me. He had science, and in addition to that he had strength unbelievable. His parries had the force of other men's cuts, and his lunges the power of battering rams. My sword was loose in my hand, and my back was already to the wall, when of a sudden my adversary staggered, crumpled and fell on his face.

It was Giovanni who had come to my rescue; and, his work done, he was returning hastily to his sheet tying.

"Get into the antechamber!" he shouted to us over the clash of steel. "They will outflank you here! Drive them into the antechamber!"

Which we did; not, to put it briefly, without difficulty. It will be remembered that we wore no armor, whereas our adversaries had breastplates and helmets at least, and some of them greaves. Pietro, entering the antechamber before me, encountered a slash which cut off some half inch of his chin; and if I had not thrust over his shoulder while he parried a mow at his ankles, he would have received a sergeant's sword full in the left side. I had already got an ugly cut on the forearm—luckily the left, because it was so deep as to numb the muscles; and I was blind in one eye (save for moments after I

had found time to wipe the same) because of a slight slash across the top of the head.

It was the desire of our opponents, naturally, to drive us back again into the larger room; they charged four times, until we were staggering with fatigue; and were about to charge once more, to our certain undoing, when Giovanni, his work on the rope finished, came to our aid. He came like a raging lion, and slew incontinently two guardsmen who were holding me in play; and with a backslash knocked down a fellow who had been about to pin Pietro to the wall.

But then he did what neither of us had had the wits to do. He rushed forward alone to the door of the antechamber; burst like a thunderbolt into the rank of men drawn up in preparation for the charge, and by sheer shock drove them back to the far edge of the stone landing. It was his strategy of Two Rivers, with a spiral staircase taking the place of the swamp. He sent his sword through a man's throat and pushed him with his foot so that he fell clanking backward on top of his brethren who were climbing to the combat.

Pietro and I, seeing the plan, rushed forward and knocked down the three men remaining; and within an instant the stairway was blocked. It was no more than a twist of steps, one man wide, about a central pillar; the men falling tumbled on the heads, not only of the topmost attacker, but serially on the shoulders of all those below, and each man thus struck staggered back upon his neighbor. What a clanking of dropped swords and of falling armor and of cursing ensued!

"To the rope!" cried Giovanni, turning to where Bianca was weeping on the bed. "Stay thou here, Luigi, and if others mount, throw them down likewise. Pietro, come tend the rope. I will go first with the lady. They'll be sending out patrols to intercept us if we are not quick." He went first, of course, because it was necessary that some one take Bianca down that perilous cord in his arms; and he, being the lightest of us, would put less strain on the rope. But I knew, as I stood panting at the head of the stairway (no one came up) that since he had been gruff with her, Bianca would esteem his motive to be cowardly—and indeed, before he snatched her up and thrust her through the window by main force, she attempted to protest that Pietro should lead, because he had done all the fighting.

And when we reached our horses—some two minutes before a patrol burst raging forth from the castle and started to hunt for us in the wrong direction—it was on Pietro's saddle bow that she elected to mount.

RIDING homeward through the mists of approaching dawn, I tried to prepare Giovanni for the fate I saw in store for him; to comfort him against the time it should be made manifest; and to instruct him a little in preparation for the future.

"It is thanks to thee that all our throats are not cut or stretched at this minute," I told him—jerkily, for we were proceeding at a gallop, "but for thine own happiness, it would have been better to do otherwise than thou hast done. A kind word to the girl would have availed thee more than the saving of her, and Pietro could have tied the knots. Ah, Giovanni, women! Soft words and the brandishing of the sword should have been thy part in this night's work—"

And so I went on, telling him how the fair sex hath always preferred appearance to reality, however much they may lose by the one and profit by the other; *videlicet*, liking hair better than brains; preferring kind words to kind actions, and a swordsman who accomplishes nothing to such a man as saves them by making ropes and pushing folk downstairs.

I came to the end of my lecture just as the sun rose; because the first rays, revealing our camp close at hand, revealed to me also the slightly smiling face of Giovanni.

Seeing the which, and noting particularly the expression of his eyes, I

realized with some slight shock that he knew, and had long known, much more about such matters than I did myself.

But how much more he knew; and to what use he was planning, even then, to put his knowledge, I did not know. Had I been capable of such a conception I, too, might be ending my days as a count; rather than as an old guard captain, pottering about this village on your Highness' bounty; watching the spring leaking out of my legs and the strength out of my sword wrist. Or I might have been many years deceased, like most of those I knew who had such abilities.

Well:

Naturally, we were no sooner arrived than it was boot and saddle and away to Venice before old Faldisi could start an army after us; and at the urging of Pietro we made the march in one day. This was on account of the lady's reputation, for which Giovanni gave notice that he cared very little if it was to be saved at the price of horses foundered; but we foundered the horses and left her in respectable lodgings before dark.

Then, of course, it was a question of what to do with her; which she solved by marrying Pietro, one day when Giovanni was absent seeking employment from the republic. I was in Giovanni's room at the inn, listening to his account of how he had sped, when Pietro entered and confessed what had come to pass.

Giovanni said nothing. Only he leaned back in his chair and regarded Pietro with glittering eyes.

"I—I," said our captain, "am—come to make amends. I—"

His voice died away and he swallowed and grew red. Poor fellow, he regarded his fault as very black; had he not filched his friend's beloved from under the said friend's nose?

"What amends can there be?" said Giovanni slowly. "The girl's wed. I wish you joy."

"I will give satisfaction," says Pietro. "Here and now, if you like, Giovanni."

"In what manner?"

Pietro touched the hilt of his sword. My young friend arose, pushing aside his papers and smiling sadly.

"I am not unworthy," protested our captain. "I love her, Giovanni. Hark you, I love her; but I would have said nothing—nothing, ever; had she not this day confessed her love for me. And there was a priest in the house, and—"

Strange, how often there *is* a priest in the house when a woman confesses her love. I thought of this later. At the moment I was all absorbed in Giovanni, who now walked over to the fireplace and rested his arm on the mantel and his head on his arm. One would have sworn he was stricken to the heart.

"Nay, nay, Pietro," he said in a muffled voice. "I am content. There is no need to cut my throat."

So they stood there, and I sat between them, in silence for some seconds.

"Who will command my troop?" asked the young man without raising his head.

"Thy troop? But, but—" said Pietro, "surely thou art not to leave us?"

Now Giovanni stood upright and smiled. Very ghastly.

"But look you," poor Pietro went on. "Look you, Giovanni. Bianca hath no taste for my freelancing. And she hath an estate near here. We had planned to retire to it, for a year at least. Meantime I had thought that you—that you and Luigi—might take command, and the men are so devoted to thee, Giovanni—"

Giovanni nodded his head.

"Ah!" he said with a deep sigh. "The men!"

And he came over and sat down at the table. Likewise he buried his face in his hands.

"I will do it," said he. "But leave me, Pietro; leave me, I beg of you."

So deep had been his sorrow, and so had his voice trembled, that it was some minutes after Pietro had departed, ere I dared go over to the lad and put a comforting hand on his still bowed shoulders. At the which touch, he sat bolt upright, exhibiting a face so far from tearless as to

be strained with an excess of triumph.

"*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*" says he hoarsely. "Victory, O Lord! Luigi, thou'rt a witness to his giving me the troop."

He snatched his hat from where it lay in a corner, and with another movement had donned his cloak and reached the chamber door.

"I go to buy cannon," says he to my dumbfounded face. "Wake up, man! Get the troop, bring it hither, and see all is in order. We march at dawn."

So, of course, commanding with none to say nay to his ventures (naturally I was no more than his lieutenant, and much less in power than I had been before) he had made, by the end of the year, enough money for the purchase of the troop; which Pietro sold very cheap to atone for the great betrayal.

And then he bought guns and raised the strength of the troop to four hundred; and entered into a partnership with Matteo Scarlatti, much to that old war dog's woe and his own profit; and helped Venice against the Count of Monterosso gratis, simply in order to enlist the count's disbanded guard; continued to act, in short, according to his nature, and became what he is today; three times a count, and so on.

Trusting that I have made the which nature quite clear to your Grace, I kiss hands and subscribe myself,

Humbly the servant of your Highness;

—L. CARADOSSO, Historian.

Postscriptum

BUT one thing comes to my mind, that may shed light on the constitution of the *condottieri;* I add it for your Lordship's profit, though my wrist aches damnably and there is *no more wine.*

By this time, Pietro had been forgiven by old Faldisi—who, as I say, had always approved of him; and had returned to Bugasto to take command of the forces. He was very high in honor; it was said the old man intended to give him a county and a title; and, while we were engaged with the Florentine campaign of 1537, we heard that he had been blessed with a son.

This was in the autumn, and it had been raining without cease for sixteen days. Pietro's letter found Giovanni and myself wet to the skin, trying to arrange certain matters of commissary under a shelter made of sodden horse cloths. There was a chill wind from the north, moreover; and for two days we had had very little to eat.

"A son," says Giovanni, staring, as it were, through me. I thought he was envying Pietro, and musing on what he had lost; so that his next words astonished me. "Poor fellow! A mistress by marriage, and no easy one; then the old Faldisi forgave him, and he had a master likewise. Now he hath another master, in this child. Whereas I—"

He was in command, he meant; high command, with no master; and on his way to higher, where he should be more and more the master of others.

Rising from the puddle wherein he had been sitting, he stretched himself in all directions and grinned. Aye, he was in command, as he had wished to be ever since the first day I had seen him; he was in command. He looked forth from his shelter at the dripping trees under which the troop was bivouacked, soaked and dismal in appearance, but his own. He seemed to draw strength from the spectacle. His smile broadened.

"She was a pretty girl," said I, being neither in command nor comfortable; but he seemed not to hear me.

"And she was in the way of loving you, Giovanni. Sons live after one."

This too was lost in his absorption in the troop. He did indeed say "Ah!" but it was not to my address; he was waking himself, as it were, from a blissful dream.

In the manner of one refreshed by sleep, he reseated himself on the wet earth and poised a pencil over the back of Pietro's letter.

"And now," says he joyously, "concerning those harness buckles? . . ."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

IN THE June issue Comrade Robert Frothingham of the Ask Adventure staff inquired if any reader was acquainted with the famous old Grenadier march, "The World Turned Upside Down." The inquiry was partially answered by several dozen readers, and although the origin of the tune remains in doubt, the correspondence was interesting enough for generous quotation. The following letter outlines the historical background for the march.

Petersburg, Va.

Perhaps I can offer some information about the matter, but none as to the actual words and music. On October 19, 1781, the British troops under Lord Cornwallis, after a fairly successful march of destruction through Carolina and southern and southeastern Virginia, were bottled up in Yorktown, Virginia, by the combined forces of American and French allied troops under Washington and De Rochambeau and the French naval forces under De Grasse, and forced to surrender on that date. Terms of surrender were agreed upon that morning and at 2:00 p.m. the British and German mercenary Regiments marched out between a mile long line of American and French troops to the 'surrender field' were they were to lay down their muskets, cartridge boxes, and other accoutrements, which were subsequently used by the American troops in the concluding phases of the Revolutionary War.

A current report of this scene states that Regiment after Regiment, with colors cases and drums beating the ancient tune 'The World Turned Upside Down,' defiled from the defenses and marched out between the lines of American and French to a large open field encircled by French Dragoons where the colors were turned over to a group of American Sergeants and all arms and such equipment either grounded or stacked systematically. From all reports the French troops, which were excellently armed and equipped, were the only ones to have a band of music with horns and other wind instuments. Both the British troops, including the attached Anspach and Hessian Regiments, and the Americans seemed to have for their bands only a small corps of drummers, and sometimes a combination of fifes and drummers, probably for each Regiment.

In October, 1931, the *Yorktown Sesquicentennial* was held at this same Yorktown, Virginia, and a several days' pageant depicted various scenes of this memorable siege and surrender. A detachment of several thousand United States Army troops were detailed by the government to assist in this, and they camped at Yorktown a month ahead to rehearse for the coming scenes. They wore the old uniforms of that period—rented from a costume house, of course—and used the old type Krag rifles which were longer than the present Springfields, and drilled in the formations and tactics in vogue in the 1780's. One of the last scenes depicted was the final surrender. The British, in their colorful uniforms, marched out through the double line of French in their dazzling white and gold uniforms and the Americans in their variegated Regimentals to the surrender field and laid down their arms.

The committee in charge of this pageant performed a great deal of research work in connection with this affair, and they dug up the fact that the British marched out with drums beating the ancient tune, 'The World Turned Upside Down.' All details were carried out as correctly as possible, bearing in mind of course that this was to be a pageant condensing a long series of events into a short space of time. I am sure that this committee left enough records and reports to enable one to find out more about this old march, and it is probable that these reports have been filed with the Government in Washington, as Congress created a *Yorktown Sesquicentennial Commission* and appropriated a sum of money to help out with the expenses.

—M. C. JACKSON, JR.

Comrade Frothingham, after receiving many letters on the subject dropped us this note:

San Francisco, Calif.

For the benefit of all and sundry, here are the words of

"The World Turned Upside-down,"

as they appear in Kenneth Roberts' historical novel: "Rabble in Arms":

"What happy, golden days were those
When I was in my prime.
The lasses took delight in me,
I was so neat and fine.

"I roved about from fair to fair,
Likewise from town to town,
Until I married me a wife—
And the world turned upside down."

The tune—a rollicking march—was played by the British military band, at the Surrender of Cornwallis after the battle at Yorktown, Virginia—General Washington "in the chair," October 19th, 1781. One of our readers states it was sung to the tune: "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." It is easy to see that it fits the meter.

Another good scout wrote the music and sent it along with the statement that he has played it on the bag-pipe and the fife. But it bears no resemblance to the above. Still another "doughboy" declares he heard it played as recently as 1925 by the First Infantry Band at Fort Sam Houston and refers inquirers to the bandmaster, First Infantry, Fort Warren, Wyoming.

Two lonely verses is all I've been able to dig up. They look as if they had the makin' of "Hinky Dinky Parley Voo." Here's a chance for our poetasters.

—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM

HERE is a letter extending and clarifying the very brief mention of customs among the San Blas Indians in a recent issue.

Washington, D. C.

I read the notes at the end of June Ask Adventure section and was greatly interested in the short note about the San Blas. As a matter of fact, the San Blas Indians are not all quite as ferocious as some arm-chair explorers make them out to be. There is no question but that outsiders are not wanted in their territory and that persistent intruders have been killed. The story is well known of the force of Panamanian soldiers (or really police) who tried to capture the San Blas territory a number of years ago, with a result that no survivors returned. On the other hand, outsiders are within certain limits rather cordially received at one or two of their settlements. For several years the United Fruit Company had a small banana plantation with headquarters at Perme, some fifteen or twenty miles from the Columbian border. This fruit plantation was in the San Blas country, of course, and included a small Indian village called Anachacuna. It was a small settlement of possibly 200 or 300 people. These Indians had learned to know and trust the Fruit Company's Superintendent, Theodore Blaich and his wife, and they were always welcome in the village as were any visitors whom they escorted. I have made two visits to Perme and have been all through the village of Anachacuna, in company with Mr. Blaich. The San Blas were very friendly and jovial and appeared to be a likeable people, and particularly so if you fed them plenty of cigarettes. Generally speaking, they did very little work for the Fruit Company and the Fruit Company was obliged to rely very largely upon Jamaican and Columbian negroes for labor. Of course, very few people went to Perme, and those few were always friends of Blaich. Perhaps the Indians would not have been so cordial toward outsiders who were not sponsored by a man in whom they had the utmost confidence.

Two things on which the San Blas are really insistent are first, they don't want anybody in their villages after dark, and second, they don't want outsiders paying any attention to their women. The San Blas have preserved a racial purity for centuries or perhaps thousands of years and they will not permit any outside blood to be introduced. They have actually killed in past years several women who have run away or married outsiders. Similarly, they do not permit their men to bring outside women into their country as wives. Of course, the result of preserving his racial purity has made the San Blas a rather degenerate race physically, in that they are short and squat and ugly and are far inferior, in my opinion at least, to the Darien Indians on the other side of Panama.

The San Blas also have a small settlement at Sasardi which can be visited but only with considerable difficulty and then by one who has won the confidence of their chiefs. Traders are rarely if ever allowed ashore and all trading is done by the Indians visiting the traders' schooners in their dugout canoes. There are a few San Blas around Escoses which is about on the site of New Caledonia which was John Law's attempted Scotch settlement in the 18th century. These San Blas can also be visited without much difficulty or trouble.

The Panamanian Government looks upon the San Blas Indians somewhat as wards and will not grant permiscuous permission to visit them. Anyone going into the San Blas country must first stop at a little island Porvenir and get permission from a Panamanian official, which permission is only granted for fairly good cause. There are a few Indians on this island.

One can also see a few San Blas in Porto Bello, Nombre doe Dios, and Juan Gallego, and an occasional San Blas is found at Colon. They are, however, not very great travelers and prefer to stick to their own section of Panama.

With the exception of Anachacuna and Sasardi and Escoces, I doubt if visitors would be welcomed in any part of the San Blas country, although I also doubt if they would be killed—the chances are they would be thrown out physically. However, I don't think visitors would be allowed inland at all but would have to restrict even their trading activities to the coast villages mentioned. One rather odd experience I had on my first visit to Anachacuna was finding an American negro from Memphis, running around nude but painted all colors of the rainbow. He apparently had been unwittingly carried off from New Orleans and landed at Colon. He had not the slightest idea where Colon was and attempted to walk back to New Orleans, but unfortunately for him had headed in the wrong direction and gone toward South America instead of North America. He apparently had spent several months around the San Blas country and not been molested, probably because the Indians thought he was crazy and they have the usual savage awe of crazy people. This negro later got back to Colon and was shipped up to New Orleans.

I have quite a number of interesting pictures of the San Blas and quite a lot of information about them, mainly gained first hand, and would be only too glad to lend the pictures to any really interested person who would want to see them and give them what information I have. The Theodore Blaich I mentioned before knows quite a lot about the Indians as he lived among them for around four years. The last I heard of Blaich he was working for the United Fruit Company at Tela, Honduras.

To sum up, I would repeat that I don't think the San Blas are quite as bad as painted but I wouldn't advise any wanderer to go haphazardly into their country. He might escape with his life but he might also have to take a pretty good licking. Anyway, there are a whole lot more interesting places around Central and South America to explore than that area between the Panama Canal and Columbia.

—P. J. Searles,
Lieut. Comm., U. S. N.

HERE we have another mystery! Does any comrade know the country and the phenomenon in question, and the explanation?

New Orleans, La.

Ta Fuente de Sangre (The Fountain of Blood) has flowed on and on throughout all ages, so far as it is able to trace. It exactly resembles blood and some say it is blood.

Just at the south side of the pueblo of La Virtud in the Department of Gracias in the southern part of Honduras, not so very far from where the International Highway should pass, is a cave at the side of a little wet-weather branch.

From the roof of the cave is a continuous stream of red liquid the same as blood, that drips down and runs out of the cave and mixes with the waters of the Rio Chiquito at its side. Dogs, birds and insects eat it with much relish. It smells, tastes and has every aspect of real blood.

One authority says it is from a peculiar formation in the earth above that has the same chemicals in the ground of which blood is composed. Another says it is from the many bats that inhabit the cave, but until several years ago, no one knew for sure, and may still be in ignorance unless someone has recently been there with a chemical outfit.

A bottle was sent to the States for analysis, but burst before it arrived. Another was sent to England but before arrival it had decomposed so that an analysis was impossible. The people of Honduras say it is a subject that deserves a thorough study.

—Wilmer Williams

THE following letter is one which requires little introduction. It comments on a matter recently discussed in these pages, and comes from the widow of one of the finest figures of manhood ever to rise in the West—Bill Tilghman, frontier peace officer, town marshal, and prototype of the best of those men who protected life and property during the outlaw years. Bill Tilghman died only a few years ago, falling under the gun of a drunken prohibition officer he was trying to subdue. His memory will survive while the West survives.

Mrs. Zoe A. Tilghman, a valiant and exceedingly well informed person in her own right, says:

Oklahoma City, Okla.

As you have given space in the May and June issues to the subject of the bank robbery at Medicine Lodge, perhaps you will be interested in the story told about it many years later, and which I believe to be authentic. This was revealed at the death of 'Uncle' Joe McNeal, some years ago at Tulsa. Mr. McNeal had been a resident of Oklahoma since 1889, was widely known and respected as a reliable and upright man, as his general appellation of 'Uncle' shows. He was a resident of Medicine Lodge at the time of the bank robbery, in 1884.

The men were cornered in a sort of cave south of town, and smoked out by a fire with plenty of kerosene, near to opening.

Hendry Brown, the marshal of Caldwell, asked for an interview with Mr. McNeal, and I believe one or two officers were present. At any rate, Hendry Brown begged them to let him get away. The robbery, he told them,

was 'framed' by the cashier, who had been a friend of his; who came to see him at Caldwell, and begged him to undertake the robbery in order to cover up a shortage which he had made. He planned the robbery, setting the time when the president was to be away, driving out to inspect some cattle. Brown enlisted his deputy and two others, and they entered town as planned, saw the signal agreed with the cashier, and entered the bank. The cashier had promised them payment for their work.

Just as they had got in, the president appeared from the back door of the small bank building. Whether he was armed I do not recall, but think he was. At any rate, the men's first thought was that they had been double-crossed by the cashier, and they shot him first, then the president, and fled.

Mr. McNeal certainly believed the story, and the officers were impressed; but the mob was then roaring about town, and they felt themselves powerless. Brown begged 'for a chance' that the mob should not hang him, at least. And so they agreed to give him the chance to run for a horse. Whether they foresaw the outcome is not known. But Brown did get a chance to make a break, and was shot down by the mob. The others were hanged as told.

Mr. McNeal further said that the president had left town that morning on a cattle trip, as indicated, but had returned after driving a few miles, apparently having forgotten something. As was his habit, he drove his team to the back of the bank building, and entered by the back door as described. This Mr. McNeal regarded as corroborating Brown's story.

I have heard my husband Bill Tilghman speak of the robbery, indeed he pointed out the place of capture as we drove past on a trip. And he spoke of the mystery as to why Hendry Brown had undertaken the robbery. He said Brown had always been well regarded as an upright man, though 'hard' enough to be marshal of Caldwell. This was before Mr. McNeal's death revealed the story. As he had known Mr. McNeal for many years, he said that he believed the story told by him.

As to why Mr. McNeal kept it for all those years, there are plenty of reasons. The mob which had killed the men comprised most of his fellow citizens of Medicine Lodge. The men were dead, and investigation which tended to exonerate them would incriminate their executioners. Any investigation probably would have been choked off, and Mr. McNeal would have won the ill will or enmity of his townsmen to no purpose. There was no rigid system of bank examination then, and as the principals were all dead, it seemed likely that no evidence could be found.

Mr. McNeal left the account in form to be published at his death, which occurred about 25 years after the events at Medicine Lodge."

—Zoe A. Tilghman
(Mrs. Bill Tilghman)

HERE is a letter from a comrade whose intelligent analysis of *Adventure*, blunt and even a little scathing, only puts the staff on its mettle and affords us that feeling of gratification that comes from knowledge of an audience difficult but willing to be pleased. I am glad to print this here, because essentially we are all in sympathy. *Adventure*, as every other institution in the world, has faced its difficult days, and come through them, I think, gloriously.

United States Fleet,
Destroyers, Battle Force,
U. S. S. Talbot (114).

In a recent issue you invited comments, criticisms and suggestions. I take this opportunity to 'get a load off my chest' that has been simmering for some time.

I have been a constant reader of *Adventure* since 1918—qualifying me in some measure, perhaps, to put my oar in the water and pull a long stroke. First made *Adventure's* acquaintance in a Filipino hut—long abandoned—in the jungle some twenty miles inland from Olongapo, Luzon, P. I. in the summer of 1918. Found a muchly mildewed copy in the rubbish inside said hut—dated 1916—and have not missed a copy since.

Of late I notice a change in the format and contents of *Adventure*—a change that I, personally, do not like. Break out a copy of the period 1918-1924 and you will notice differences—and these are the differences I mean. You can compare your present style to the style of that period, and will notice many differences. The principal objection I have is to the general tone of the magazine. It used to be—well, shall we say, 'dignified?' I doubt if that is the exact term I wish, but it is close enough. The present day magazine approaches too closely to the current 'Wild West' school of fiction for my tastes—and there are many other *Adventure* fans who think as I do. The cover of your June issue—to hand as I write this—is indistinguishable from the covers of a dozen cheap Western thrillers to be found on any newsstand. And I notice a steady retrogression in quality of contents as well. Especially the by-line under the titles in the table of contents. That isn't necessary, as from speaking to many newsstand operators in all parts of the world I find that the bulk of buyers of this magazine ask for it by name and are not casual purchasers.

There are too many Westerns in your contents of late—and some of them are very

little in caliber above the trash that is published by the bale elsewhere. I have nothing to say against Tuttle, or others of equal ability—but there have been stories that did not measure up. The old *Adventure*, with stuff by Friel, Mundy, MacCreagh, and others too numerous to mention, was the finest magazine in its field. The only cheap thing about the old *Adventure* was its price.

I have no especial wish to see *Adventure* return to its 'highbrow' period of '26-27 or thereabouts—though it was a darned good experiment and I for one was sorry it didn't go over, but jack up the price to two-bits again, raise the issue date to twice a month, (and put it out on the stand on the date of publication—that is, the June 1st issue on sale June 1st), and increase the quality of contents to the standard of the old *Adventure*, and I for one, can settle back into the shadows around the fire and rest contented. I very likely would continue to read *Adventure*—a habit of sixteen years is not easily broken—but would be a little better pleased if some of the changes mentioned herein could come to pass.

But I know that running a magazine is a tough job—you can't print a magazine for one small class of readers and make it pay—and if the current *Adventure* is the best you can do, why—I suppose I and many who think likewise will continue to purchase it. There is always something in it worth reading. And for the luvva Mike don't cut the 'dope in the back.' In common with the majority of your readers that's always the first thing I turn to. Got the habit when A.S.H. was navigating, and it's stuck to me.

I think this letter is long enough—too long, perhaps, and so will bring it to an end. With best wishes to yourself and to the other members of the staff who have brought me many, many hours of relaxation and enjoyment in the past, and will bring many in the future, I hope—and to the old magazine itself.

—R. D. Tittle,
SK1C, U. S. Navy.

IT IS rare indeed for this magazine to print letters either of criticism or praise. The letter just above violates all custom; nevertheless I included it because of its excellent presentation of an honest opinion—and because it gives me a chance to answer at one sitting all those who have written or feel like writing a similar letter to the editor.

I wish I could invite all of you into the office to see for yourselves how a magazine is put together and how it faces the problems of national publication. To begin with, an issue must be laid down months in advance of its appearance on the stands; the stories must be read, approved, bought, and prepared for the printer, and the printer's proofs must be painstakingly read and corrected several times. The simple inertia of publishing delays us for months on end even when we are most impatient to hasten the improvements we have under way. A city newspaper can be distributed in an hour; a magazine must cover forty-eight States. The process takes time. Improvements take time.

It is not necessary to reply in detail to Comrade Tittle's letter. The magazine itself will provide the most eloquent answer. Many readers will differ with him on some points; on others he will find no one in heartier accord than the men of *Adventure's* staff. No one reveres more the splendid *Adventure* tradition, no one has more to gain by its preservation.

We have already given our pledge to seek diligently for the finest fiction available in the adventure field. You may presently judge of our success by the issues coming to your hands this year. Another promise given some while ago is about to be fulfilled. *Adventure* comes to you twice-a-month again with the September issues, the 1st September issue ready on August 20th. It is an improvement you have long demanded.

We offer it as a token of our fidelity to the tradition that first drew many of us together more than twenty years ago, and has held us in bonds of enduring comradeship ever since.

—W. C.

ASK ADVENTURE

For free information and services
you can't get elsewhere

A VAGABOND in the Land of Conquistadors (on fifty cents a day).

Request:—"Will you be kind enough to send me an estimate of the cost of a vagabond tour through Mexico for a year?

"I would plan to 'rough it,' but just the same I want to know that I'm not going to starve because of the lack of money. My funds are not large so luxury will be practically eliminated. Transportation to a large degree will be by foot.

"Is there any red tape connected with the carrying of a camera into the country?"

—L. WENDELL JORDAN, Braintree, Mass.

Reply by Mr. John Newman Page:—A "vagabond" tour through Mexico for a year sounds enticing. The costs? Fifty cents a day, if you'll do it my way, in additional to transportation and outfitting expenses. Perhaps a little less, once you learn the ropes.

My advice is to buy a waterproofed tent, a folding cot and bedding, the necessary cooking utensils, and a burro to pack it for you. The essentials of your outfit, purchased, except for your burro, in Mexico City, will cost surprisingly little. The following (in American money) is a close estimate:

Tent, waterproofed, purchased from Juan Planas, Celle Dolores, Numero 1	$10.00
Folding Cot, purchasable from Planas	3.00
Bedding	10.00
Cooking utensils	2.00
	$25.00

With your outfit purchased, it might be best to go by railroad to some town outside of Mexico City, and there buy your burro. Be sure to get one with sound feet and no sores on its back. A good one will cost you about ten dollars, in American money.

Thus equipped, you can travel where you will and when you will. If you can boil coffee, broil meat over the coals and put together a meat and vegetable stew, you can live on the fat of the land for the sum I have mentioned. Country women will flock to your tent with eggs, chickens, cheeses, fruits and other foodstuffs for sale, and with offers to wash your soiled clothing. You won't care too much whether it rains or shines, with your waterproofed tent over your head, and you'll have a great time. I know!

Camera? I've carried one pretty well all over Mexico without being questioned about it, and so have many of my friends. I understand, though, that foreign aviators, flying over seaports or fortifications, are forbidden to carry them. I believe that's the only restraint. A final thought. You'll need a Tourist's Identification Card, obtainable at the Mexican Consulate in Boston and good for six months. You can renew it, once in Mexico, for further six month periods—always provided you are not caught seeking employment of any sort. That's the foreigner's one unforgivable crime in Mexico.

Good tramping!

TO AIM, to throw, to transfix, there's a problem. We've had so many inquiries on knife throwing that we publish Capt. R. E. Gardner's short monograph here.

"Proficiency in knife throwing is secured only after countless hours of practice, carefully planned and rigidly adhered to. There are no short cuts.

"To begin with the knife should have a sturdy blade capable of withstanding considerable abuse, the single-edged type with a thick back suggested. The momentum is what effects penetration: the heavier the weapon the greater the penetration; yet a too heavy blade should be avoided. The balance should be at about the center of the length dimension.

"The fine cutlery of Remington and Marbles is not designed to withstand the abuse of knife throwing and for the beginner, the short model bayonet for the U. S. Krag and German Mauser rifles is recommended. These blades are well designed for throwing, can be altered without sacrifice of design and are strong enough to be serviceable under the conditions imposed by the novice. The average thrower will probably find them too long or too heavy. To correct this condition grind off the desired amount of weight and length from the point end of the blade, maintaining balance by removing a like amount of metal from the heavy pommel.

"To throw, grasp the point end of the blade between the thumb and forefinger, the back of the blade inclined toward the forearm

and resting in the hollow at the base of the two digits mentioned. In this position the edge of the blade should be to the top to avoid damage to the fingers upon release of the blade. Throw with an overhand delivery. Avoid too much wrist snap as that increases the number of revolutions of the knife in flight. At the start employ a range traversed by not more than two revolutions of the blade, end over end, and practice until able to consistently strike the target, point end first. After this is accomplished the range may be extended to four revolutions but try to maintain a course covered by a knife revolution multiple of two.

"If serious in your intention to become proficient do not become discouraged. Remember these facts. All fiction to the contrary notwithstanding—there is no authentic record of a thrower who could throw over a varied course, at a moving target, with any assurance whatever that the point would strike home.

"To the best of the writer's knowledge there are no text books in English upon this subject. Probably because of the effectiveness of projectile arms, the bow and arrow and firearms, knife throwing was never a common practice of any tribe or race on record. To the early man the knife was a valued belt companion for use as weapon or tool as occasion demanded. When once thrown they must be retrieved or lost, and the state of their owner's defenses was reduced by their passing."

THE truth about the prospecting game of chance.

Request:—"Will you advise me on prospecting in the United States at the present time?

"Would a young healthy man experience a lot of difficulty trying to gather a few dollars worth of gold daily? The local papers carry articles on this kind of work and while the monetary appeal is not large, the thought of rugged outdoor life and experience appeals. I have done plenty of hiking and traveling about the United States but know nothing of prospecting.

"If this idea does not sound too far fetched, your advice regarding 'where and how to prospect' will be greatly appreciated."

—CHARLES H. BROCKER, Chicago, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—You cannot take the glowing accounts in the Press and magazine articles for what they imply. What is wanted by reporter or writer is an arresting and spectacular story, so he culls some of the successful strikes but says nothing of the majority of gold hunters who get much less, or nothing at all. For example, in California, the best state for placer in 1931, over 10,000 new prospectors entered each of whom averaged $1.60 a day. You can see that to make that average a high percentage had to be blanked. Next year, 1932, the average fell to 40 cents per man, caused chiefly by the increased number of prospectors. In interior Alaska (where best placer is found) statistics covering a 20 year period by the United States Geographical Survey state that the average sniper (pocket hunter) makes $450 a season, while it costs him $750 for grub, tools, clothing and transportation.

All prospecting is pure gamble. All you can do is to get into favorable country and go to it. May be lucky, or may not, but it's folly to bank on even low wages, or any sort of a living once your grubstake is exhausted. This has always been so, but reporters and many of our writers in the best circles know nothing about mining except what they are told. Often overdrawn or even based on error. It is true that many men during this depression *have* made a living and more by prospecting, but the big majority of the hordes that line our western streams today aren't in that class, and many have become burdens on the State.

If you have an adequate grubstake—O.K.; otherwise not, especially if you have employment of any sort, or a chance for it. If you are footloose, with none depending and enough cash to see you through, I'd say go to it and take a chance. Not otherwise. Frank, and mighty true. This life has its fascinating side and also its conpensations other than the rewards in raw gold, in way of health, cheap living and new and often exciting experiences.

Luck!

THERE was an elephant in the time of Supayalat's glory who put *Wild Cargoes* to shame.

Request:—"I recently read a yarn centered around the Nepalese Terai, in which a native is crushed to death by an elephant's trunk. I had always thought the trunk was rather a sensitive organ used only for drinking and picking up relatively small objects. Would it be possible for a large animal to kill a man in this fashion? And is it a general practice in those parts for the elephant to lift its mahout up and down on its back with its trunk?"

—ED. T. TURNER, Staten Island, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—By no means did the story you read exaggerate the possibilities of an elephant's trunk. Certainly the trunk is capable of picking up an object as fine as a pin, and is yet a weapon of tremendous power.

All mahouts train their elephants to lift them to their backs by means of the trunk; and, what is more, to lift them high above their backs, so that they may pick ripe

durian fruit without the trouble of climbing trees.

Perhaps you have seen Frank Buck's latest picture in which he purports to catch an elephant in Ceylon. There's a good deal of hooey in it. For one thing, elephants through British India and Burma are government property under the strict control of the Keddah Department, which has the monopoly of catching them. No moving picture outfit would be permitted to walk into the jungles and catch an elephant. For another thing, once caught in the "Keddah," a crowd of men doesn't go in on the second day on foot with two tame elephants and prance around with stocks while the tame ones picks out the prize youngster for the moving picture man's zoo.

However, the picture does show elephants using their trunks for pushing down trees and for lifting and carrying huge logs.

As a weapon an elephant uses its trunk to hold down a beast as large and full of the devil as a tiger and then trample on it. Also sometimes to seize and throw an animal—or a man.

Some years ago I had a job in the Keddah Department, working in the Katha district of Upper Burma. There it was my misfortune to see a wild elephant catch an unwary native and throw him forty feet, slam against the corral wall and break him up like a bag of marbles.

It is an authentic story that the execution elephant of King Mindoon of Burma, (before the British captured Mandalay), would catch the criminals turned over to it for execution and would throw them into the air and impale them upon its tusks as they came down. If it missed spitting the man it would hold him down with its trunk and quietly step on his head, crushing it like a coconut.

A gruesome story about this elephant is that when Supayalat, King Thebaw's queen, immortalized by Kipling, persuaded Thebaw to sign the order for the execution of his seventy-odd brothers, on the ground that they were a menace to his throne, they were turned into the execution pen that same night, and the elephant went on a mad orgy, trumpeting and screaming around the walled enclosure, wading all through that horrible night knee deep in mashed limbs and blood.

By morning Thebaw had repented of his order—to which he had been driven by the sheer nagging and bullying of the queen and her mother—and he rescinded it. But Supayalat, crafty she-devil, knowing her husband, had already put the order through for immediate execution.

Thebaw, in repentance, summoned his priests and asked them what he might do to assuage his soul; and they, wise in their craft, told him that the noblest thing a man could do upon this earth was to endow in perpetuity a monastery for the support of priests.

So Thebaw built a wonderful monastery of carved teak wood and gold leaf to house exactly the same number of priests as the brothers who had been killed. And there the monastery stands today, in Mandalay, and is full of sleek priests who live in fat comfort upon the endowment.

The elephant, by the way, is a not too ill behaved resident of the Rangoon zoo today. He is chained by the leg and the keepers don't go within reach, lest he might remember the days of his glory. But he seems tractable enough and will salaam for sugar cane if you hold it out to him from a safe distance.

WHERE the Maranon washes pay-dirt the headhunters and cannibals dwell. Good placer: rude neighbors.

Request:—"I am considering a prospecting trip by way of Peru to the head waters of the Amazon or rather the Maranon where I understand there are many undeveloped alluvial deposits.

"Have you any information relative to this and the attitude of the people toward prospectors coming into their country.

"What do you think are the possibilities. Any information you can give me will be appreciated."

—JOHN G. BAIRD, Gary, Ind.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—The Maranon, as the upper Amazon is called, counting from where it assumes this name on up to its source in Lake Laura-cocha near Cerro de Pasco, Peru, is a thousand miles of river with many affluents. There would be little gold from Iquitos on up to the big cataracts (Manseriche) at the lower end of the big bend where it breaks through the last of the Andes and swings east along the equator. There is pretty bad Indian country up above the cataracts for a hunded or two miles, especially on the tributaries that flow from Equador. This is the Zaruma and Jivaro country, both tribes being headhunters who perform the head shrinking in a slightly different manner. To the south side of the river along this portion there are anthropopaghi and savages. On up above, however, on up to the very source one strikes milder aborigines in progessive stages of tameness until the conquered and spiritless Quechuans are reached in the high Andes.

True, my friend, it will depend on just where you figure on striking the upper Maranon. If you came in from the west you could strike it above the bad Indian country and proceed on down to the limits of their country without undue danger. If you had some one with you who is familiar with these savages and knew how to proceed without trouble you could pass on down through. Whether you could prospect in their country is something else again. *Quien sabe?* I

have always had a suspicion that the bulk of the gold up in those regions is in the country inhabited by these very ones. They always have a bit of gold to trade when they come out from their borders into Ecuador or on down the river to Iquitos. They are not, however, a mining people. They subsist on bananas, manioc, fruits, fish, and dried monkeys. They use bows, spears of chonta palm, and poisoned arrow blow-guns, also a wooden, fire-hardened, or steel macana or machete. The poisoned arrows are used for stunning game, or killing it, as the poison does not make it unfit to eat. To be entirely frank, the main number of heads they take as trophies are those cut off enemies in raids. The cannibals south of the river eat their enemies taken captive in battles. The Indians on the Napo and Cururay Rivers are friendly. There is gold in the bars up these rivers after you get up out of alluvial lowlands. It would be a good dredging proposition if one had the financial means and the necessary political arrangements to be able to put one in. The line between Ecuador and Peru is unsettled and each country likes to give concessions in the part the other country claims.

Things you never knew till

ADVENTURE TOLD YOU

(This material is compiled entirely from the files of *Ask Adventure*)

THREE of the most highly prized food delicacies of the Chinese are obtained almost exclusively in New Guinea, a land which still remains one of the wildest corners of the world. They are: birds' nests, from which soup is made; shark fins, which are dried and cured and devoured with relish; and bêche-de-mer, or trepang, a wormlike and repulsive sea slug varying from a couple of inches to a yard in length which inhabits coral reefs and has the unpleasant habit of ejecting its viscera when dragged from its native element.

ALTHOUGH the invention of cannon is credited to the Arabs in the 12th Century, it is to the Chinese that credit must go for first use of their own invention, gunpowder, in the propulsion of missiles in war. About 969 A. D. in the reign of the Emperor Fai-Tsu they attached rockets to their war arrows and gained a great increase in speed, range and killing power—the dawn of the age of artillery.

ABOUT 30 years ago American stock growers abandoned their former practice of marketing only old sheep to the meat packers and began offering young lamb free from "sheep flavor," thereby eliminating an old prejudice and greatly increasing the consumption of lamb. Today, old breeding ewes, after six or seven years on the range, are butchered solely for the foreign population of the large Eastern cities, who demand the "wool flavor" owing to their lifetime habit of eating only the old sheep of their flocks in the old country.

DESPITE the fairly common instances of painful death attributed to the venomous bite of the "black widow" spider in the West, medical authority holds that the bite or sting of *no* insect (six legs), spider or scorpion (8 legs), or centipede or millipede, is fatal to man. Many of these creatures can inject sufficient poison to kill the various tiny prey they feed on, but human deaths ensue from infection of the wound, or a morbid physical condition favorable to death from any cause, or heart failure—or sheer terror literally scaring the victim to death.

CASEY JONES, the original of the famous song of that name, actually existed—his real name was John Luther Jones; he was an engineer in the employ of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad at Jackson, Tennessee, in the '80's; and he met his death in an accident of record for which he was in no wise responsible. The original verses, eulogistic in character, were composed about 1900 by a negro coal passer, Wallace Saunders, in appreciation of the dead man's memory.

THE MONGOOSE, world famed for his prowess at killing the deadly cobra in his native India, has always proved ineffective when imported to combat venomous snakes in this hemisphere. No efficient method of exterminating the rattlesnake has ever been discovered, and in New York there is a society of over one hundred members who pursue the practical if risky hobby of spending their week-ends in the country catching rattlers.

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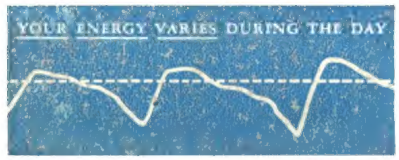

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